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AN ARTIST'S LIFE

This is the autobiography of Britain's best-known and most broadly controversial artist, a gay iconoclast and brilliant painter who has exhibited with the Royal Academy for over fifty years and been its president for five. Shortened from three long volumes to one, this remains a richly categorized and vital work through which fresh air strikes blow.

"Will undoubtedly prove to be a work of potent and lasting charm, and of major value to future historians of the social and artistic life of our times," said Prof. Thence Bodkin (*Manchester Post*).

"It will delight all who cherish 'good company where laughter is not regarded as barbarity' " (Ivor Brown).

AN ARTIST'S LIFE

THE SECOND BURST · THE FINISH

The Autobiography of
SIR ALFRED MUNNINGS

K.C.V.O. · PAST PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY

*Specially abridged for RU from three volumes
and with an introduction by*

W. G. LUSCOMBE



LONDON 1955

READERS' UNION
THE MUSEUM PRESS

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Received on 7.11.54

This Readers Union edition was produced in 1955 for sale to its members only. Full details of RU are obtainable from Readers Union Ltd, 38 William IV Street, London WC2 and at Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire. The book has been reset in 10 on 11 pt Imprint type, printed and bound at The Aldine Press, Letchworth, Hertfordshire. It is an abridgement of three volumes entitled 'An Artist's Life', 'The Second Burst' and 'The Finish', first published by the Museum Press Ltd, London.

FOREWORD

FEW books published since the war have aroused more enthusiasm among critics and public alike than Sir Alfred Munnings' autobiographical trilogy. It was my good fortune to work alongside the Past President of the Royal Academy during the three years it took to produce and publish the original volumes under their titles: *An Artist's Life*, *The Second Burst* and *The Finish*. The total number of text pages was 1,074 and the number of illustrations 505.

This volume to be published by Readers Union contains chapters from the three original volumes and I do not doubt that when readers have finished this shortened version they will thirst to read the fuller story and be glad to know that it is still available.

Remembering that Professor Thomas Bodkin had written of it: 'The whole work will undoubtedly prove to be of potent and lasting charm, and of major value to future historians of the social and artistic life of our times' I found the task of selecting the chapters for the present volume an exacting and difficult one.

Sir Alfred's gift for expression in print rivals his fluency in paint, and throughout his story we see the self-critical painter continually wrestling with the problems of art. From experience I can assure readers that Sir Alfred is just as critical of the written word. During our work together nothing proved of too much trouble whether it was a fact which needed checking or the tones of a block which had to be corrected. On many a week-end – when the majority of people relax – we worked at Castle House from ten in the morning until Dedham village had gone to sleep window by window and only Lady Munnings remained – to see that I had a sandwich in my pocket as I made my way back to the local inn in the early hours of the following morning.

One does not need to be an artist or even artistic to enjoy Sir Alfred's autobiography for he has so obviously lived his life to the full and, above all, in open-air pursuits and with a profound love of the countryside. 'This wonderful Jeroboam of a book,' wrote one critic, 'winking and bubbling with good stories.'

One of the main values of this autobiography – three great vintages, we called the original volumes – is the brilliant picture it leaves in the mind, as another critic wrote, 'of a gracious, mannerful, erudite, warm and laughing period of English life which has gone from us'.

You will not find better descriptions of the English countryside in any book. The pages breathe sunshine and willows by the brook, the colours of jockeys' silks against the sky – the parades, the paddock, the racing starts – and against it all one sees the determination of one of the greatest artists of our day to paint the scene as he saw it however great the task. No one loves to paint the contours of the country and the mighty rhythms of tree and copse and cloud more than Sir Alfred. Many, many times during our walks together he would suddenly stop and exclaim: 'Look at the lovely shape of that oak, Luscombe. Now what of the crazy dreams of surrealism!'

Just as this book will be valued in the years to come so will the experience gained in its production prove a source of value and of inspiration to me. I look back to the memory of many wonderful walks across the Essex and Suffolk countryside, to evenings of great fellowship in the Athenacum, and I shall always be proud that I was privileged to publish this great work in its original form.

WILLIAM LUSCOMBE

London, 1955

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I

MENDHAM MEMORIES

EACH Sunday my father read the lessons in Mendham church, and often in such style that folk walked from other parishes to hear him. He read parts of the Old Testament in the grand manner, and kept his eye on us over the brass eagle. Overhead a swallow or bat would fly up and down under the old roof, where arched supports rested on carved half-figures. I knew those figures by heart, and wove curious ideas about them. For I gazed up at them through many sermons. My father, in spite of his weekday jaunts, was deeply religious, and stood with his right hand on the poppy-head of our pew repeating the responses in a loud and determined manner, especially the part about being 'Dam'd'.

For a period my mother played the organ, but she was less orthodox than father, and latterly seldom went to church. At times, in good and dutiful mood, I used to blow the organ-bellows for her when she practised. I was a sentimental boy, and on one occasion when doing this, the sad and melancholy notes of the organ in the empty church brought me to tears; for that day we had lost our favourite red-poll pedigree calf, which we had called Lady Rowena, from *Ivanhoe*. The music seemed a dirge, and with a lump in my throat, a chill of sheer misery made me cry out again and again, 'Rowena is dead, Rowena is dead!' Yet those lugubrious wailing notes went on vibrating above and around in the growing gloom of the November evening, and I grew more and more dismal.

I am still sentimental, and feel the same today when I see and hear the mounted band of the Life Guards – grey horses again; or the boys singing Grace before a City dinner. I insert here some pages from my mother's short diary in which she not only gives an interesting picture of the far-off days of her girlhood in 1867; but also tells of the restoration of the church. One can well imagine what the old interior looked like before this senseless restoration, which alas! was happening everywhere at the time.

Extract from mother's diary referring to Church and Sunday School.

Sitting in the Church, my thoughts wander to the past and it is again peopled with old faces in the high pews, the organ is in the gallery and either Miss Burton or Miss Louisa Beaumont playing. Then the Sunday

School was held at 9 am and 2 pm, and the old room was crowded. Miss Eglinton, the schoolmistress, presided, and excellent order she kept. The children were divided into six or seven classes, sitting on forms arranged in squares. I was very proud when first allowed to have a class. The elder girls sat in the gallery and sang, the others had forms in the chancel and were under Miss Beaumont's eye. The boys were grouped on forms round the font in charge of old Johnson the Sexton, commonly called, Sire Johnson. He had a peeled ash stick and it was frequently heard on the head of a boy who was misbehaving. Mr Brereton was the Vicar then. He was considered one of the best preachers in the neighbourhood and our church was always well attended, all the families living at the Mendham part of Harleston driving down every Sunday.

The restoration of the church was commenced in April 1867, and the nave was bricked up and morning service held in the chancel. Mr Brereton, that summer, took duty at St Cross and Homersfield, for Mr Rose, the Rector, who was away – we generally drove Mr Brereton. Our church was opened the following winter, and the preacher at the morning service was Mr Owen, rector of Heveringham, a very popular preacher, his wife was formerly a Miss Holmes of Gawdy Hall. The Bishop (Pelham) preached in the afternoon. It was quite a gala day in Mendham, the Weybread choir assisted in the singing and Mr Bryant played the organ.

About this time a great revival took place in Church Music, and several villages round here joined the Diocesan Choral Association, which provides trainers, and we had a Mr Honiford to instruct our Choir, also Fressingfield, Metfield and Weybread. I think I first played the organ in 1869, the old finger organ. In 1872 we had the present organ erected by Bayton of Ipswich. The opening was a grand affair, Mr Hemstock of Diss being the organist, and Archdeacon Groom the preacher. Mrs Elborne, Mrs Shearing's daughter, used to play when she came over, and wonderful effects she got from the instrument. She taught me a great deal. I played the first Sunday after it was opened and for several Sundays, and I had already had lessons and was taking morning service at St John's, Harleston, for which I was paid £15 per annum by Mr W. M. Hazard. As I have said before, Mendham church was very popular, young men from Harleston walked down in the afternoons, and a full church was the rule – now it is sad to see the empty benches. In those days it was not considered respectable to stay away from Church, most of the farmers went in the mornings, and they congregated at the chancel door, all wearing top hats, for their gossip, filing in at the last minute.

A word about our school treats which were great events, invitations to them and the dance which followed at the Vicarage being greatly coveted. Everyone contributed to the commissariat department, bread, butter, cakes, fowls, sweets etc for the supper, and everybody was happy. The old women and mothers were invited, and one standing event was old Mrs Feaviour's song and polka – she was a wonderful old body. She lived in the cottage down the drift to the Walsham Hall Marches 65 years and was famous for her garden and fruit. The produce she used to make pay her rent. The people here live to a great age – there are several now over ninety.

The past is gradually taking shape. Thinking again of my father's fast driving and the accident with the grey mare takes me back from church to stables, and I see the pet monkey which lived there. Sometimes it was fastened with a long, light chain; sometimes it was free. It was not a small monkey, and was looked upon as an amusing curiosity rather than a pet. When free, it turned up anywhere: in the cherry-trees after the ripe fruit, or swinging aloft in the tops of the weeping ash-trees on the lawn. I see it being pursued in the house, where it got to the top of a four-poster bed with an apple. Only Saxby the groom was able to handle it, although one hot Sunday I saw my father throw it in the river to show a visitor how it could swim, which seems to me, now, an unkind act. I recall to mind a scene in the stables – Saxby trying to catch the monkey (it must have been a female, poor thing). It was sitting on the back of a rugged-up horse, embracing two newly born, mewling kittens. Below was the mother cat, as helpless as the groom. Each time he tried to catch the monkey, it sprang from the horse's back to the loose-box partition, and on again to the next horse and next partition, and finally up to a beam above, where it was left to console itself with the kittens. I was really afraid of the monkey, even when it was fastened up. One day as I went into the stables it tried to reach me at the end of its chain. There was yelling with fear by the corn-bin, the monkey on its hind feet pulling at its chain and not quite able to clutch my legs. I remember Saxby appearing and sending it flying with a half-filled bag of chaff. There were more escapades, and finally, after getting into the maids' bedroom and scaring them out of their wits, my mother said she wouldn't have a monkey on the place, and it was given away. On summer days, driving past its new home, we could see it sitting on a barrel placed on a tall post on the lawn. Poor monkey! no more friendly horses, no more adventures. I think of it now with pity. No pity was in our hearts then; we were too young. Poor monkey! in a northern climate, away from any of its kind; cast among stupid, ignorant humans and their young, not caring what became of it.

We had a nanny-goat, too, which had a black stripe down its back. The goat pulled us in a little four-wheeled cart. We seemed to take it as part of our life, and thought little of it. I don't even know when we last used it. But I have painted goats since, in gipsy pictures, and have wished I had paid more regard to that kind creature which used to pull the youngest of us about, with the governess walking.

Of course we had tame rabbits, but I wasn't keen on them. I always wanted to ride the white pony Merrylegs. I dreamt about her and called her mine, and when my father walked to Redenhall church, some three miles away, on a Sunday afternoon, I used to ride this white pony. If two of us went with him we both rode on the pony, one behind the other – I being always in front, for I hated the round edge of the brim of my brother's straw sailor hat scratching my forehead. What quarrels we had over such rides!

In those days there was a post on Sunday mornings, but no delivery. I often rode to Harleston, two and a half miles away, with the stiff brown-leather

post-bag, for the letters. I was so small that if I got off the pony I couldn't get on again, and so I used to sit in fear of heaven knows what, until someone in the post office saw me and brought out the letters. I was six years old then, and adored that pony.

When my father finally took to driving fourteen-hand ponies, I ventured to ride them as I grew bolder, never telling quite all that happened. Yet I stuck to it in spite of being chucked off again and again. I was told never to let go the reins, and so more than once I was dragged along on my stomach on the miry lanes. The job then was to mount, for those ponies were full of corn. They did a big mileage, my father often attending six different markets a week, some of them a long way off. Monday – Eye, fourteen miles. Tuesday – Halesworth, fourteen. Wednesday – Harleston, near by. Thursday – Bungay. Friday – Diss, about eleven. Saturday – Framlingham, seventeen. And now and then he went to Norwich, twenty miles. These journeys were not always direct, and he drove according to the needs of his business as a miller.

Once I remember I had been dispatched in haste to catch a wagoner who had started at six in the morning with his load and had forgotten his delivery bills or tickets. All went well until I was nearing the village of Metfield, when Jack, the black pony I was riding, suddenly made something an excuse to take me home. We fought until he reared and backed into a ditch and I lost the reins, for he walked all over me! As you can't hurt a boy of ten, I crawled out and followed the brute, weeping. I was ashamed of myself, and all mud from head to foot. Then, suddenly, through an open gate leading into a ploughed field, I saw that rascally pony with dangling rein trotting across to a ploughing team. The ploughman stopped his horses and hid himself behind them, and as my pony came up to smell his horses he quietly stepped out and took the reins. That incident is plainly engraved on my mind. The cold, raw day; the heavy clay of the furrows; my pony – a smart, clipped-out black, a mouse colour we know so well – his ears pricked, smelling the patient team; the wise, kind farm-hand in his weather-stained corduroys, sack on shoulders, coming out and taking charge, waiting for me to come up.

The clay on my boots weighed me down so that I was breathless and all but weeping again as I approached. The ploughman helped me to clean off those heavy masses of clinging clay, lifted me once more into the saddle and sent me off. I often wonder who that kind son of the soil was. As a horseman, his wages then would be eleven shillings a week.

My next fear as I got to the gate was whether Jack would try to take me home; but I was ready for him with my stick and fear of what my father would say if I didn't get those bills to the wagoner ahead, and I had the brute going full split before he had time to think. When I caught the wagoner some miles ahead he looked me up and down. I was covered in mud, and hated him to know that I'd been off.

My mother protested in vain against me riding that pony, but my father's word was law and I had to go. Too much corn was the trouble.

Another black pony which I liked riding because he had no guile in his make-up was Hero. Many horses and inns long ago were named after Nelson. The Norfolk Hero is an inn sign used in East Anglia. He was a larger pony, and I felt myself a great horseman when astride Hero, and used to hope that I looked a wonderful boy to those I met on the road. I always took a secret peep at myself in the shop windows at Harleston.

The favourite and best pony of all was a Welsh bay with small pointed ears and a white streak on her face. Her name was Fanny, and she lasted on until she was nearing thirty, and for many years pulled my mother about in her four-wheeler at a sober pace.

This sweet little mare lived on, so that years later when I went home for my holidays from Norwich, full of ambition to show other students at the School of Art how I could paint, I used to have her held, not allowing my mother to go out in the four-wheeler. My mother had to give in, and why not? I was shut up in a lithographic place of business all the year, with one fortnight's holiday in August, and here was my chance. After I was twenty and had left my lithographic work, I was still using the same pony as a model in pictures.

II

EARLY DRAWINGS

FROM the days of governesses to those of school I am unable, as I recall earlier years, to place important happenings. There is only one familiar background with its leading feature, the river, for we never went farther away than Norwich, and a journey there was only a rare event. When I did go I was so frightened at the traffic that I daren't cross a street.

The years went by with the same games and doings for the various seasons. Bows and arrows in the spring, when the tall dead reeds were right for making arrows, on which we fitted elder arrow-heads, and we played marbles and had tops and whips. There certainly was an art in the making of those wonderful tops with their toe of metal – usually a shoe-maker's stud nail. I had a famous one, and thought a lot of it, and could even draw its exact pattern today.

But what of drawing and painting? How can I tell when I first began to draw? I do know that on Sundays we either looked through the largest scrap-album that ever was, or, when tired of that, begged father to draw. He always drew horses.

Our drawing was done on the inside of used envelopes cut open. My elder brother was always drawing, too. I remember being so jealous of a pencil copy that he had made of 'A Yellow-hammer and its Nest', which I saw pinned above his bed, that I viciously rubbed it all over with a wet finger and destroyed it. I was punished for this and sent to bed.

I see myself drawing the 'Jovial Huntsmen' after Caldecott, in all sorts of adventures – sometimes even at sea. I wrote underneath 'Three Jovial Huntsmen Fishing', or 'At Sea', or 'Having Dinner'. The number of these cut-open envelopes increased, and everybody – friends, the parson and all – were shown these attempts while I stood by. I shouldn't say I was proud, or bashful, or that my work depended on their judgment. For, like all children, I drew as I might have played a game, until, to make a guess, I may have been seven or eight. Then I went twice or more a week for drawing lessons at the vicarage under Miss Kate Brereton, a daughter of the parson. These lessons opened up fresh paths. I forget when they ended; but at some time after this I began drawing the trace-horses, taken from the farmers' wagons which came with four-horse

loads of wheat to the mill. They were tied to the white meadow gate in front of our house windows, while the shaft-horses pulled the wagon under the lukem platform, and the sacks of corn were unloaded, being drawn up by a bright, shining chain from the wagon.

Early wagons would sometimes arrive in front of the dining-room window as we were at family prayers. Springing up, leaving us there, maids and all kneeling against chairs, my father went through the glass door into his office for the sample of wheat bought at market. Then, through the window, we saw him put his foot on a spoke of the front wheel of the wagon, mount the shaft, open the first sack and compare the wheat with the sample. This having been done, he climbed down with the words, to the wagner, 'Alright, Cocky. You can drive on.' After which he rejoined us, still on our knees, and resumed prayers where he had left off.

Often there were several wagons with grand teams of horses, their manes and tails done up with red and blue or yellow ribbons and straw plaiting. The journey to the mills with the corn was, next to harvest, the event of the year on a farm. The teams of chestnut Suffolk Punches with brass-mounted harness from Lord Huntingfield's farms were a magnificent sight. Some time after harvest, when the wheats were threshed out, a long line of horses and wagons reached all the way up the lane and round the corner, for over a quarter of a mile. The wheat was shot into the large bins in the upper stories of the mill, until there seemed to be no space left for more – yet more went in. What beautiful flour and wheat meal we used in the house then; and what home-made brown loaves we ate, with the most perfect butter, salted exactly as it should be. I could shed a tear now at the thought of the indescribable flavour of both.

Chestnut-trees stood along the south side of the lane, and horses from the foremost lot of wagons were tied underneath them. The more the wagons the longer the horses had to wait, and I remember the great amount of brass on the harness. Two men were with each wagon as a rule, the wheat, in many cases, coming long distances – fifteen or more miles. I can smell the sweet, curious scent of the horses in the lane now: a scent of pastures coming through the pores of their skin. A glorious smell, the very opposite to that of petrol.

My first sale, I believe, was a pencil drawing of a trace-horse belonging to a well-to-do farmer, a Mr Sewell, who lived at Alburgh, in a pretty and well-kept house with geraniums in the flower-beds. He saw this drawing when calling one day and gave me five shillings for it. Could I ever forget that? Of course it went into my money-box.

Mr Sewell wore a half-crowned high hat, was sallow and dark, with a trimmed beard and shaved upper lip. He had a straight, firm mouth and dark brown eyes, rather sad. He wore a light pepper-and-salt overcoat with a rose in his buttonhole, and drove a very nice horse in a very clean, low gig. My father often took me to call at his house at Alburgh, between Harleston and

Bungay. I can only recall that Mrs Sewell wore a lace cap and satiny clothes and earrings. She was a kind body.

But I must not forget the feature of our home – of our lives – the river. In summer and winter alike this was really our true playground, and great happenings were enacted upon its surface and upon its banks, for we had cousins and other lads to join in these doings. As we grew older, devouring the works of Fenimore Cooper and Rider Haggard, reading of pirates and bush-rangers, our adventures took us about, up and down stream. In between I revelled in drawings of Indians on mustangs, trappers and scalp-hunters. One large coloured pencil drawing was of Indians attacking a fort, the air being filled with flying tomahawks and arrows.

What really made these days was our gradual mastery of an old two-ended, flat-bottomed boat which was used for getting weeds from the river after the summer cutting. Our imaginations turned this old boat into a wonderful craft. We not only made a mast and sail; we put heavy flint stones in the boat for ballast, and to do this stripped a rockery on which blue periwinkle grew. And there was trouble with those rockery stones! Imagine us in a strong March gale, with bending mast, stayed by a taut, stolen linen line, with straining, bulging sail, roaring down the long reach of river, leaving a wake on either side like that of a steam launch. The wake as it followed fast lapped over each bank. We sped onwards to the end, which was the overhanging bough of a great tree at the bottom of the orchard. The crash was frightful as mast and sail fell, while we were thrown on our backs by the impact.

How often each one of us fell in the river and escaped drowning I cannot say, but such adventures were rewarded with a thrashing. Then we were sent to bed, no longer skull-and-crossbone pirates, but mere misunderstood, unhappy boys. But who can beat the spirit of youth? Or even begin to understand it in all its phases?

What didn't we do on that peaceful river? When shoals of cut water-weed lay against 'the rack', as we called it, which stretched across from bank to bank above the weir and kept all floating weed from going down to the mill, we fished for perch from that old boat, gazing down into the dark amber depths as the worm swung in the current below. We fished for roach and dace, we found moorhens' nests with their eggs, and in the reeds, small nests of reed warblers. Their continual song was a background to our frolics and adventures.

Moods for outdoor games and adventures came with the seasons. Ice, snow and floods forgotten; spring in the air; marsh dikes alive with spawning frogs; marsh marigolds along the river bank; pale, dead reeds bright in the sun – reeds for arrows!

Choosing the straightest and strongest of these – strong as walking-sticks – and putting a piece of sharpened elder on the end, we made them into arrows.

On our way to school, the steep, clay sides of a hill, grown with thickets of ground elm, was our place for selecting and cutting bow-sticks. During the weeks before Easter we became expert makers of bows and arrows which were

no mere toys. The serious craft we practised was handed down from boys of the past. A good bow shot a big distance, and what exercise and excitement were ours as we stalked the yards, measuring the shot across the meadows, with, in our mind, the exact spot on the clay hillside where the particular elm-stick had been cut for the bow.

Through March weather there was kite-making and kite-flying, an outdoor game as old as the rest. To have the strongest, lightest, and biggest kite was the aim of every boy who flew one. Our kite-making became a nuisance. Paste had to be made in the kitchen, goose-wings for putting on the paste were taken, newspapers and scissors were taken, an empty room at the top of the house was taken, where large scientific kites were designed and made with paper and paste, under the guidance of a mill-hand who knew all about the length of tails and balance. Rearing and straining in the wind, a large kite would at last be sent off, the string paid out faster and faster; the kite unsteady, making fantastic dives in the air. The mill-hand would say, 'Wants more tail.' At last the kite was balanced, and soon we were watching it, a speck of light in the sun, far up against dark clouds, taking more and more balls of string, until we could beg no more money to get it at the village shop, or if we had the money, the string ran out.

The days come back to me. The nursing of a kite up and up in a lighter wind. The frantic haste in paying out the string as it soared in a stronger breeze, we gazing at it reaching 'height above unknown height'.

On the meadows men with horses harrowing and rolling, moving slowly across and back; making wide, velvety tracks on the sunlit grass, as the custom had been on all Good Fridays ever since I could remember.

Whitsuntide followed, with the willows in fresh, new green; and we made our yearly walk to South Elmham Priory. Fences and thorn-trees white with May blossom. The marshes, as far as you could see, one blaze of buttercups; and daisies, as well as buttercups, covered the home pastures. There were horse shows in small towns, where flags festooned the streets. A large flag flew from the church tower as the bells rang out all the afternoon, their sound mingling with the neighing of mares and foals in the show-ground. Tents with lunch or tea and a strong, sweet scent of trodden grass, while a band played waltzes and old tunes, instead of an amplifying van with records.

Hay-making time came round too quickly. All hands were called in for this, for my father made good hay. There were the rows made by the drag-rake, the cocks, the carting, the creaking of the wagons, and the making of large stacks in the stackyard. Tall poles stood at each end of the stack-in-making, so that at night the stack-cloth was stretched across. The cleared hayfields still scented the air as we played cricket on the pitch now open to us.

Later, I remember, there was in the old, tarred boathouse above the mill a new, varnished boat from Beccles. It was a good stiff boat, with plenty of room in the stern. My mother's great joy was a picnic, and as we now had one boat above the mill and one below, we could go either up or down the river to the

scene of our spread. If I were in the bows, I trailed my fingers in the tepid, soft water, plucking up the yellow lilies from their stubborn hold, looking down into the clear current with waving weeds below. Homewards again, with cattle standing above on the meadow, their reflections showing below the line of water-moss bordering banks grown with forget-me-nots and scented with meadowsweet. The clatter of oars at the finish, the getting out tea-things and baskets, the chaining-up of the boat and the lap of water in the boathouse as the last one steps ashore. All these memories of the river crowd thickly in my mind.

Opposite the boathouse the kitchen garden bordered the clear-running mill-stream. Close to the path stood an old apple-tree which came into all our doings, and was called the Doctor Harvey tree. On warm days scents came from raspberries and a still richer aroma from black currants hanging in dark clusters where startled blackbirds flew away with a full-throated cluck! cluck! – the same yesterday, today and always. Down the stream by the mill were wooden steps, with a handrail to the water's edge, where men filled buckets of water for the horses in the stables. The sound of the mill was the background to our dreams.

An old chorus song which came long before 'After the Ball', and was sung with sentiment and feeling, runs in my head now: 'The Old Rustic Bridge by the Mill':

Beneath it the stream gently ripples;
Around it the birds love to trill.
And though now far away,
Still my thoughts fondly stray
To the old rustic bridge by the mill.

Hot days in July and August, and bathing. Learning to swim on bundles of bulrushes. I recapture the smell of the river as we revelled about in our depth where there was a gravel bottom. Our diving grew wonderful in deeper water. Fast-running dives we took, and if any watcher were there, how we loved showing off! We swam long distances underwater; we made great jumps from the bank far out into the river; and when it was over, we lay sunning ourselves, then dressed and went to tea in the harbour under the weeping ash in the garden. For tea we had small, brown loaves, sometimes a new ham, eggs, jam, beautiful butter, buns and cake, all home-made, the work of our good mother. When everything had disappeared, more took their place next day.

I give here an extract taken from a diary written later by my mother on Sundays over a period of a few years:

I have been reading Longfellow's verses – 'The Rainy Day' – it is typical of my feelings. At times the loneliness and sense of loss overcome me, and I think – What use is Life? But no doubt there is still something left for me to do. The daffodils are in full bloom; as I stand near dear little Joe's grave beneath the ash trees, I live over again the happy times we passed in their

shade, the summer tea-parties, when I lay there so many days on my sofa. In the years to come, when Mendham is only a memory, I know they will all look back to the happy summer afternoons and talk about them, perhaps, when I am in my grave. Writing of graves reminds me, that before church this morning, I sat on the wall by the old floodgates, and made a wreath of daffodils and ivy which I placed on my mother's grave when I went to church. The service was not, to my mind, refreshing or peaceful.

And here she is, in rather a more optimistic mood for Sunday:

A beautiful south wind, bright sunshine; we are spending Easter alone. I love the rest and quiet and leisure to stroll about with no duties calling me indoors. The cows are doing well. I had a brood of chickens off this morning and watched them basking in the sunshine. After breakfast, I wandered across the north meadow and leaned over the rails at the ford – musing on the past and all the happy holidays I made for my children; the big bakings, the merry tea table round which they all assembled on Christmas Eve.

There were tea-parties on the lawn with aunts, nice girl cousins and friends. Sometimes an Australian cousin from Cambridge, with a tenor voice, came to stay with us; and he brought with him once for a vacation the great Figgis, winner of the Lightfoot scholarship, and afterwards a famous historian. He it was who gave me Longfellow's 'Hiawatha' and other books of poems to read, so starting me off with a love of poetry which has given me great happiness ever since. Inspired by Longfellow I did a water-colour of a sunset sky reflected on the floods and wrote underneath:

Can it be the sun descending
O'er the plain of level water?
Or the Red Swan floating, flying,
Wounded by the magic arrow, etc. etc.

I gave it as a birthday present to my mother, who used to read 'Hiawatha' aloud to us, which infected us with sweet melancholy.

If ever a man was a hero, our cousin Stanley from St Catherine's College was one. He expounded 'Hiawatha'. I hear him now reciting the lines:

And the rushing of great rivers
Through their palisades of pine trees.

He wandered far across the marsh with a gun, always hoping to shoot a heron. He declared to us that when at last he did hit one, he saw it turn round and pick the shots out of its behind. There was not a marsh dyke he couldn't clear, and we followed – often with a splash.

Let me keep yet awhile to the seasons of my youth; the autumn days, of which Longfellow wrote. The elms and the maples along the hedgerows changing to bright yellow. Rich, dark ploughlands with yellow leaves scattered over the headlands where plough teams came and turned, the ploughman at the handle with line and guiding voice, 'Come here, whoa; get on, Diamond'.

Let me picture afresh the floods when the marsh up and down the river was

one vast, desolate sheet of water, studded with island gateways and rows of pollard willows with their inverted reflections. An alder or poplar here and there traced the course of the yellow flow of the stream as it grew swifter and stronger, like a broad moving floor nearing the weir, and, farther on, the flood-gates. White spume-flakes hurried by and disappeared down the yellow slide of weed-smelling waters of the weir, roaring in turbulent masses of foam and, racing on, carving out great slices from banks, pouring through the orchard and by pig-sties, meeting the other maelstrom from the floodgates, where eel-nets, taut and stretched, were submerged in the weight of the flow.

The floods were a great adventure while they lasted. How sure was I that I could paint all this sky and water! What pictures I set out to do! Alas! when I tried, the wide stretches of flood would look like snow.

There are yet the frosts and snow to tell of, which were often the cause of floods and which lasted for weeks and weeks together. Lanes drifted up level, and there were snow-ploughs with horses and men who were given hot, mulled beer to drink. Then a thaw, followed by floods and more frosts and hosts of folk all skating. Some skating and pushing others on chairs; some cutting figures on the ice; skating all hours of the day and in the moonlight. Sharp, hard, sparkling frosts, and a church cold in spite of stoves on a Sunday.

In the mornings, our towels, like Mr Jorrocks', were frozen stiff, and the water in the ewer was a block of ice. As we lay in bed we heard the bang of cracking ice on the river, and hated getting up and going to school.

During these passing years we three brothers had, one by one, left the wings of a governess and walked daily to a grammar school, two miles away, at Redenhall.

We liked the walk, carrying our satchels; loitering if early, hurrying if late. We liked that school with its headmaster, Christopher C. Hall. He made history interesting to us. He encouraged me to draw. We had football and cricket, and a drill sergeant, a bathing-pool and lessons in swimming, at which I won a prize for swimming in the best style. We had canings and Speech Days and we were happy. We even liked the French verbs.

In these days of school and home lessons we nevertheless had evenings of reading during the winter. If it were Scott, my mother was chief reader, one of us occasionally taking a turn, the rest listening to the adventures of *Ivanhoe* and *Front de Breuf*, and *Sir Brian de Bois Gilbert*. We pictured the storming of *Torquilstone*, seeing *Framlingham Castle* in our minds. We saw forest glades of oak, and deer sheltering in the bracken.

When we drove to Norwich – a long journey – our mother always went to a bookshop for Scott's novels. One in particular she determined to find – *Count Robert of Paris*. We went through *The Monastery* and *The Abbot* and *Rob Roy* one after the other to the last word.

The truest heroine of romance, that I loved best of all, was *Diana Vernon* in *Rob Roy*. It was the period I wished to read about. She wore a gold-laced, three-cornered hat, and when, many years later, I was staying at Chantilly

with Baron Robert de Rothschild and saw some of the French hunting-women wearing the same sort of hat, my mind at once went far back to the days when I used to picture Diana Vernon on her horse in *Rob Roy*. A glow on her cheek, a light in her eye, her brown hair clubbed and tied behind with a broad black ribbon.

Then came *The Woman in White*, and *The Moonstone* – two thrillers; and once when my elder brother was reading, or stumbling along through an intense period in the former, my father, who was a good reader, snatched the book from him and went on himself, trembling with impatience and wrath at the incompetence of his son.

The famous old book, *Frank Fairleigh*, should not be left out. I have not forgotten it, and never shall, for we lived through all those adventures in many happy hours of reading. Yet another was *The Count of Monte Cristo*, which for some reason – it may have been later days – we read to ourselves.

It would be impossible to say which book made the evenings at home in that lamplit room the most alluring. Shall I say *Pickwick*? My father read it to us, and no one else, for he certainly could read Dickens, and he was practised through having in his younger days been in great demand at popular, penny readings held in country districts long ago.

Before beginning to read, he always polished his spectacles with a large, coloured silk handkerchief. With his silvering hair, his left hand usually supporting his forehead, as he turned the leaves of the book with his right, he was a picture, sitting at the table, the shaded lamp throwing its light over him and upon the book and part of the green tablecloth. To increase the light on the page, a pair of upright candlesticks stood on either side of him.

My mother, wearing a lace cap, sat by the table sharing the light; always sewing or mending, while we sat round the fire, or lay on the hearthrug with the dogs.

“Sam,” said Mr Pickwick; “Sir,” said Mr Weller, my father would read, holding back his bottled-up enjoyment of what he knew was coming, and as he read on, before he could get through Mr Weller’s following remark, tears of laughter would be dimming his sight. The spectacles would be pushed up to his forehead and yet again he had to wipe his eyes with the silk handkerchief and again polish the spectacles. Mr Pickwick lived supreme then, even as he does now, although I admit to having read *Mr Sponge’s Sporting Tour* more often.

My father’s reading of Dickens was at its best when he gave us the story of the bagman’s uncle with the vixenish bay mare in the clay-coloured gig with the red wheels. To hear him doing this was a thing to remember – a youthful experience which, with the lamplit scene in the room, will never fade or grow indistinct so long as I retain one grain of memory.

What boys could ever be leading dull lives with a good story going on each night interwoven with their work and play? A good book makes life a joy. Today I like reading best of all when, with the pillows well piled behind me at

the head of the bed, and then with the reading-lamp at exactly the right angle, I lie in contented concentration of mind, enjoying sentences, descriptions, dialogues. I am reading *Ask Mamma* now, by Surtees, and am the happier for knowing that Sir Moses Mainchance and Billy Pringle are upstairs waiting for me tonight.

But to my story. How many there are who did not in early days fully appreciate and understand a well-meaning father. Ours was a character, and in many ways he was misunderstood. I never made a friend of him until later in life, and then, alas! too late; and now, when I look back on those days, I see all that we missed, and all that might have been, had he taken us more into his confidence. Yet how kind and indulgent he was, in spite of the collects we had to learn, and the tasks he set us in the holidays; in spite of having to sit through the long, dull services, hearing him reading from the Book of Kings, or Revelation, or about Jehu, or Ahab and horses and chariots. One Sunday, at the midday meal called dinner, not lunch – cold sirloin and horse-radish, tart and cream – my mother said, 'John, I wish you would not work yourself up so, as you did in the lesson when you came to the Agony in the Garden'. 'Ellen,' said my father, 'I wish you would mind your own business!'

A troublesome thought comes to me often. How old was our father when we were very young and he used to come home cheerful; when he had driving accidents; when our mother upbraided him, and the resigned, righteous, sorrowful expression came over that live face?

'You've been drinking, John,' she would say. But why shouldn't he drink? People in Dickens' books got cheerful with friends, and this is what he used to do. He was what we call a good mixer, and got on with everybody – except Gladstone, whom he had never met.

I am recalling a weapon, a six-chambered revolver. Like a guard on a coach with a blunderbuss, my father always took the revolver with him on long journeys, when nights were dark, to and from markets like Diss, Framlingham, Halesworth. This was when we were little boys, when he mostly drove in the tall, red-wheeled sulky, until my mother persuaded him to resign it to the foreman or salesman because she said he wasn't safe in it.

The revolver was thought nothing more of than a cup of tea or a walking-stick. It always lay on the mantelpiece in the office, on the right of the centre-piece – a thing like a clock showing the days, the week and month.

Let me now use my imagination, seeing my father from my own grown-up point of view – I am almost as old as he was when he died. A live genius of a man who read *The Pilgrim's Progress* to us; who had a bookcase full of books – Josephus; shelves full of *Good Words*, bound in black leather with gilded backs, containing all those early drawings by Millais illustrating the parables, of the Prodigal Son and the rest. The Comedies, Histories, Tragedies of Shakespeare, which I possess today, also bound in black leather with gilt. Tupper's *Philosophy* in two volumes, which I dipped into, and found the lines which I wrote in an early love-letter – 'When love of the heart is blighted, it buddeth

not again. When once that old, sweet song is forgotten, it is to be learned no more. How often will youth look back and weep over early affections.'

Since living here at Dedham I have thought out his career almost from a lad. His father died at Scotland Place Farm, Stoke-by-Nayland, leaving his mother with a family of ten. To write of what I know of their history would be superfluous. Yet whenever I ride today through Stoke-by-Nayland, down the hill from where Constable painted the church, I pass a pleasant house, the home of my Aunt Hale or Hannah, one of my father's married sisters, and who, as a widow, came later to Mendham, and lived in those distant days not far from our home, with Grandma Munnings, our father's mother.

I am only now waking up to the fact that our father had a mother, a beautiful old lady in wide, spreading silk skirts. I remember the day of her funeral – the scene at the grave; my father standing there, smitten with grief and regrets; tears rolling down his cheeks. In a spate of words about painting I have forgotten these sad happenings. He stood there by the grave and wept. What did we children know of his feelings? His mother was wonderful. Confound all the people who lose albums of photographs – and all modern wars, when family treasures are lost.

But I must get back to my father and the revolver he carried with him in the sully on the long, dark journeys home from market, with leather bags full of sovereigns and silver amounting to three, four, five hundred pounds.

He used to tell us of a night when two men stopped him, one seizing the bridle of the horse, and how he fired the revolver into the air, and how the frightened horse leaped forward, knocking the man down, the wheel bounding over him as my father galloped away.

This weapon, as I said, used to lie on the office mantelpiece. The years sped. We grew to school age, to youth, to young men. It still lay there, no longer used. Victorian highwaymen were gone. My youngest brother was grown up and in love. Impulsive, like all of us and many more, he was a fast lad. He found at last a fond soul and became engaged. No ordinary girl could ever cope with such a tornado as Charles. I remember so well staying at home. His girl was there, too. I painted her in a hammock, under the old weeping ash-tree. Some months later there was a row between Charles and his girl. She turned him down. He came home in a state of 'going to the devil'. I write this from my mother's story. He swore he would shoot himself with the revolver.

My mother hurried to the office, took the revolver, and went out to the yard at the back of the house, through doors by the knife-house, as it was called – where old Billy Manning on crutches used to sit and clean the knives and give us a piece of his fat bacon when we were children. But to the story of the revolver. My mother, going through the doors to the back premises, where faggots for firing were stacked by the river, went to the edge of the tail-hole and threw the revolver into the middle, where it was eighteen feet deep.

The following week-end I was at home. On Sunday morning my peaceful-minded, ageing father came into the house from the office.

'Where is the revolver?' he asked.

'I threw it in the river,' said my mother.

Then, with an expression of utter resignation on his sorrowful countenance, my father said:

'Well, I suppose I shall have to dive for it.'

Poor father and his *Pilgrim's Progress* and the big family Bible with steel engravings, from John Martin's pictures, of the fall of Babylon and the plagues of Egypt, which we looked at on Sunday evenings. His large, black, leather-bound volumes of Shakespeare, with portraits of actors and actresses of the day: Macready, Phelps, Miss Glynn and the rest. I picture him in his early days at Shonks Mill, Ongar. And later at Nayland, when he played chess and read at Penny Readings, and got all those *Good Words* and other books bound in leather at Colchester.

I remember him telling us how Aunt Hannah's husband, who died, was the son of Warren Hale, Lord Mayor of London in 1864. He told us of his invitation to the Lord Mayor's Feast, as it was then called; how he attended the market in Mark Lane every week, long, long ago.

We knew nothing of him, his life, his brothers and sisters, his beginnings, his thoughts. And my mother, full of organ-playing, music, poetry, of Scott, Thackeray and Dickens, and a hundred sunsets over the river, red polls and their pedigrees — she knew very little more.

'And how's the good lady?' he used to say to a superior sort of farmer with a cellar.

'Quite middlin', my dear sir, quite middlin', ' was the reply.



Drawing sent home from school

III

FRAMLINGHAM COLLEGE

'Now, here's something to copy,' said the side-whiskered grammar-school master, in mortar-board and black gown. 'When you draw, Alfred, hold your pencil lightly – so lightly that if I flip it from your hand it will not mark the paper. There you are!' as he flipped it away with the third finger and thumb. He then gave me what I was to copy: a donkey's head or a classic face.

'You think you can draw, you young fool, but you're no damn'd good,' snarled a big bully, twisting my ear in his mutton fist.

When he had nearly wrung it out of my skull he sent me flying. There was no revenge. Life was harder then. Cold rooms, cold feet, cold walks to school.

Drawing for no reason – in blissful ignorance – without intent or aim, and not a care in a world of dreams, excepting home lessons. I was in a dream when I modelled a bear in clay and kept it moist under a broad leaf by the river bank. A small boy's soul went into that piece of work, which never stopped in his sleep.

My larger horse masterpieces up to then had been on a whitewashed wall of the garden house, or privy, but one day I stretched what seemed to me a vast sheet of cartridge paper on the table-top in the old nursery, and there I set out in pencil and water-colours a picture of a prairie fire. There were Indians with painted faces and feathers; some on mustangs, some on foot; trappers; bison in herds; wolves or prairie dogs, and every conceivable creature that I had read of, all tearing towards you out of the picture from a vast horizon of red and yellow flames.

This attempt was finally pasted on the wall over the mantelpiece in our old nursery, which had its walls covered from ceiling to floor with pictures from the old *Graphic* and *Illustrated London News*.

My mother went to live at Mundesley after my father died, and our old home was taken over by my brother and his wife, and the place was done up. Like the other rooms, the walls of the old nursery were stripped. The Randolph Caldecott pictures, the coloured plates from the *Graphic* Christmas

numbers going back for years, and one I loved, called 'The Haunted Room', and my prairie-fire picture, all destroyed and gone. The walls had taken years to cover, one picture overlapping the other until no wallpaper could be seen, and now nothing was left; not even the *Graphic* full page of the moon rising in the Sudan, with camels on the march throwing long shadows. I had meant to see them all again and get back to boyhood, but it was not to be. This was one of the greater of my lesser griefs.

My one, overpowering ambition was to make pictures of highwaymen, and from early years to my late teens I made many attempts to illustrate a scene of highway robbery. I still have one attempt in pencil. As the years went on, I clung to this idea, until later on it blossomed out into a large black-and-white wash drawing which I exhibited in a black-and-white exhibition of the Norwich Art Circle, under the title 'The Simple Plan - that they shall take who have the power, and they shall keep who can'. I had studied books of costume and old prints in order to be correct, and a masked highwayman, in cocked hat and caped coat, with levelled pistol, in the foreground, had stopped the approaching post-chaise. The postilion, on a rearing near-grey leader, had the true scared look, and the wheeler postilion appeared even more horrified.

My next, and last, school was Framlingham College, the county school of Suffolk. Here, in spite of canings and many unhappy days, I used to draw and paint more and more, under the tuition of a master nicknamed Bug Lynch, a peaceful, fat, curly-headed, middle-aged bachelor.

The large, ugly Albert Memorial College stood on one hill, and the old Castle of Framlingham on another, with a small valley between. I always imagined this as Torquilstone Castle in *Ivanhoe*, and made many pictures of it from the steps of the statue of the Prince Consort. What hateful lessons in Euclid and algebra went on there! Only Raven, the history master, made our work with him interesting. He read us pages out of Macaulay and Froude.

The lower fourth, where I ended up, was full of trainers' sons from Newmarket. Frank Butters was one, and it is difficult to connect that fat boy with the now grey-top-hatted man I often see in the Epsom paddock, saddling famous horses, such as Mahmoud, holder of the record time for the Derby, and Bahram, winner of the Triple Crown - Two Thousand, Derby and Leger - and a host of others.

A burning resentment is always with me when I look back to a night in Preparation at Framlingham. I was drawing something or other. Suddenly the master spoke. 'Will Munnings come here to me and bring with him what he is drawing?' He looked at it, and without a change of expression said, 'Come round to my room before Chapel.' There in his room did I bend over a chair, receiving, in spite of all my 'Please sirs', six vicious cuts with his cane, all on the same spot. How I sat in Chapel I can't tell. This was villainous treatment for what I had done.

Again, a friend, Scott, and I had started a scheme of painting each morning before breakfast in the Music Room. One day we rushed up the corridor a

minute late for breakfast in the large hall. The under-Head or next in command was a cross-grained fellow, and for this slip he ordered us to get up each morning at seven, fill his cold bath, and then parade up and down the school drive from the statue to the gates, and back, before breakfast, and until further notice. As we did our forced march each morning, longing to be back again at our poor painting, we cursed that fool of a master.

At length this period of my last school days ended. I was fourteen and a half. Closing my eyes – for this is the only way to recall the past – I try to arrange the pages of those days when I had to go out into the world.

What was to be done with me? There was no question of that sort with my eldest brother, William, for he was helping to farm some land my mother had taken for her small herd of Red Polls – a herd which, since then, he has made famous. His line lay clear ahead – he was born a farmer, but 'Alfred did nothing but draw', and how to make him an artist was a problem, puzzling indeed to my country parents. Besides, artists were poor, starving folk, few ever succeeding.

My father had a literary brother, Uncle James, of whom I only used to hear, but never saw. This uncle had begun life with a Colchester bookseller, and finally became first reader, I believe, at Bentleys, the publishers, and wrote for some years for the *Temple Bar* magazine. Piles of these magazines used to be stored in a cupboard at home, and some years ago, when I was old enough to appreciate it, I read in one of these a long article by James Munnings, on Keats. In the end, Uncle James went to Australia and died there. My mother has told me that before he went away George Eliot gave him a cheque for one hundred pounds and a pair of carpet slippers embroidered by herself. Bentleys published a memoir of James Munnings, and I believe we have a copy somewhere.

This explains how and why my father wrote to Bentleys about me. Nothing came of this, and he had all but arranged with Jarrolds, the publishers of Norwich, that I should go there in some form of employment, when, by a mere chance, my portfolio of drawings and paintings was shown to an enthusiast, who declared that I must not go into the publishing world, but into the lithographic. He not only did this, but told my father of the two leading firms in Norwich.

On visiting the first of these two, my portfolio was shown to their head artist, a Mr Howitt, and my father brought back with him a coloured advertisement for some dentifrice which I was to copy. I remember it so well. There were crimson roses and a jar of toothpaste with lettering. A most wonderful copy was made, letters and all complete – but I did not go to that firm. It was the other firm, Page Bros & Co., to which I finally was bound apprentice for the term of six years, my father paying a premium of forty pounds.

I can see myself now with mother, who took me there, passing through the works and upstairs to the 'artists' room'. This was a light room with long, wide benches below very tall north windows, the width of the artists' benches being

the same width as a window. White frosted-glass partitions separated each man from his neighbour.

There were six men sitting there on tall stools. The bench that was to be mine was next to that of the head artist, a Mr Macready, a kind and, as I found later, well-read Scotsman, with a clipped, iron-grey beard and moustache and gold spectacles. My life was happy through his kindness and love of books. All the good books I got out of the Free Library were taken out entirely on his advice.

The day came when I settled in my Aunt Jane's home in the west side of Norwich, and from there did my first of thousands of walks to and from the firm of Page Bros & Co. I must have stayed with Aunt Jane for at least three or four years. By the way, she was quite an amateur artist, and used to teach me a lot about drawing and shading, until one lesson at the School of Art placed me ahead of her.

I particularly remember my very beginning at the artists' room, for the youngest man, whose place I filled, at once took me in hand, showing me how to mix saucers of a particular precious kind of lithographic ink for the six artists. This was my first job – a job which had to be done exactly right every morning for a long period, until I proved that my time was worth more to my employers. Then a printer's boy from the works was taught to do it instead.



Conspiracy!

IV

NORFOLK CHURCHES

My very first lithographic performance was a fretwork design on stone. I scraped out a mistake, making a hole like a grave in the stone's surface. To my alarm, it was found out in the press room, a bare white patch showing on the black fretwork pattern, and the stone had to be re-polished, and I did the pattern all over again.

I soon found myself among friends, although I was not spoilt. Those six other artists took an interest in me and helped me in my work, which became so thrilling and engrossing at times that I was sorry to leave it at seven o'clock. Our hours were from nine till one o'clock and from two till seven, when I walked straight down to the School of Art, working there until nine. So I continued for six years, which sped away all too fast.

The half-days on Saturdays came and went in swift succession, punctuating the months and years. With a friend from the School of Art, on bicycles (which gave place to newer and later designs year by year), did I cover the face of an unspoilt Norfolk. We must have seen the inside of every church, and as my friend was studying stained-glass design as well as architecture, our jaunts were full of interest.

Those great Norfolk churches of Sall, Cawston, Walsingham, Brisley, Aylsham, Brancaster, Blakeney, Cley, Salthouse and Morston were familiar to us, seen against the skyline or a wide setting of woodlands and fields. Cawston was our favourite journey, through Blickling and past the famous hall. Morston, with its interior of bare, damp-stained walls and ancient pews and floor, had attractions too, standing there on its low mound, bounded by a wall, the salt marsh and sea far in the distance. Before the days of the motor-car no other part of England was so unspoiled as Norfolk, or possessed that far-away air of peace which breathed the spirit of the past.

Norwich itself was then a beautiful place, and looked almost the same as it must have done in the days of Crome and Cotman. I now realize what a playground it was for the artist. No wonder it had its famous *Norwich School of Painters*, for the artist is dependent on his environment, and no artists had a more truly picturesque home than this old city of gardens, with its cathedral,

its fifty churches, its river with wherries, boats and barges, quays and bridges. There are towers on the ancient walls of the city, alley-ways leading to court-yards and back streets, with churches hidden away, set in churchyards filled with tombs of parishioners.

As I became older, I became more and more unconsciously in love with those gabled houses in their narrow streets. Such an unlimited wealth of motifs would tempt the dullest painter. This city should never have been spoilt, but preserved and renovated, restored and cared for as a time-honoured relic of the past. It was its ancient beauty, without any doubt, that produced those artists. Were they there today they might go on seeking for vanished inspirations in vain, both in the city and its surroundings, Trowse, Lakenham, Thorpe, the Dolphin Inn, and Costessey. Shades of Crome and Cotman might well sigh around the approaches of Thorpe.

In the eighteen-nineties Thorpe Gardens were all that one could imagine such a place to have been in the days of Stannard and Thirtle. I can think of nothing more holiday-like or carefree than they looked, with their boats and riverside lawn and frontage.

Am I too full of regrets? Do I harp too long on the past? I reply, that no one with an eye to see, or a heart to feel, and a memory of how places once looked a long time ago, could do otherwise than regret what has happened to them since then.

As I grew older and rode more up-to-date bicycles I discovered new places. Often, with water-colours or oils, I used to sit and paint by the riverside below King Street, or in the Close, at the horse sales, Cattle Market or in inn yards. I blame myself for not painting more, but after a week's work, each day from nine in the morning till nine at night, the spirit arose and rebelled, and mostly we were off afoot or on wheels. There is nothing better than the bicycle for seeing a county. You carried what you needed, and left your machine against a stile, in a yard or by a porch, and, with the exception of punctures or a strong head-wind, the bicycle is a perfect form of travel.

When my friend and I really wanted to give ourselves the utmost enjoyment of seeing without too much weary pedalling, we went out north-east of Norwich to Ranworth church, which was in a picturesque and unrestored condition. This place was unlike any other, and stood above a beautiful broad with old houses and staithe complete. Here they cut the reeds for thatching. Here came a solitary wherry. Wildfowl were there in flocks, and from the church tower on its wooded hill you could see the country afar over the rich wooded landscape towards Woodbastwick and across the marsh and broadland to the far-stretching, low horizon.

On a Friday evening at the School of Art I might say to my stained-glass friend (Starmer was his name), 'Let's go to Caistor and Stoke Holy Cross and Shotesham tomorrow.' And if the Saturday were fine I don't know how I got through the morning's work. What a longing to be out on that road from Bracondale, over Trowse bridge to Stoke, with its water-mill, and to Caistor,

a famous Roman camp where a grey church stood inside the hoary mounds among gnarled oaks. No place more romantic, no place so satisfying to the soul as the slopes of those grass-grown Roman ramparts on a warm, sunny afternoon.

But yet more scenes were ahead as we came to Shotesham with its common and flint-built church on a mound.

There opposite the church stood the Queen-Anne-fronted Duke's Head, where we used to have tea. I can imagine no more beautiful English scene than the church among the elms on that hill at the end of Shotesham Common. Shotesham, to me, meant joy and holiday and no work. Little did I know that years later I should live over at Swainsthorpe, within a few miles of it, for six blessed years.

And now to the more serious and technical side of my carefree existence. My weekly wage began at two shillings and sixpence, and increased as I became more useful, until after years of toil I arrived at the stupendous sum of one pound ten shillings per week – which all goes to prove that we can be happy without wealth. I must, however, admit that I often sold my work at the exhibitions of the Norwich Art Circle for sums reaching six and ten guineas – a guinea was a very large sum. My first stunned me with its possibilities.

All artists can look back and remember early patrons. My early patron was the kindest, gayest, most happy and optimistic friend a youth ever had. He was John Shaw Tomkins, director of Caley's Chocolate, next door to Page Bros. He straightened out and helped the whole course of my life. I never knew a man who laughed as he laughed or who in the real sense of the word was such a Christian. He was full of energy and ideas, and moved about at twice the pace of an ordinary man.

Let me describe him. Fairly tall; fair, curly hair worn shortish; scant brows; busy, merry eyes which took in everything and everybody and were set rather deeply and screwed up in a smile. He always wore a good, homespun suit and beautifully soft collars, and always had something quiet and good in the way of neckties. On his head was a round black alpaca cap. But his mouth! – the firmest, the kindest and most cheerful feature in his benevolent, clean-shaven face.

We knew his quick step as he came through the double spring doors into the artists' room. He brought a breeze with him, and always had a bundle of papers under his arm. The manager, Mr Lanham, would be sent for, and the ideas began to flow: ideas for posters, for box tops, for Christmas novelties, for crackers. As I learned more and more at the School of Art and my drawing made strides, I was always the one who had to carry out these ideas of his, and this arrangement went on to the end of my six years.

He bought my best water-colours, and when my time was up and I went to the country to paint, he still gave me work, designing posters and box-tops. He commissioned me to paint his father, which I did – the old man posing on

a garden seat surrounded by white phlox and Canterbury bells, with his collie by his side.

On later occasions Mr Tomkins took me with him to The Hague, to Amsterdam and to Berlin, then on to Leipzig Fair. At Leipzig he did great business through a fat interpreter, a Herr Hoffman, who had a bright-red, curly beard and a fat stomach.

A. J. Caley & Son ran a luxurious-looking stall in one of the departments of this great fair at Leipzig, and Tomkins wanted posters. We went out with Herr Hoffman and bought great rolls of calico-lined cartridge paper, colours and brushes, and soon, watched by an admiring crowd, I was at it, not caring for anyone. Such doings seem utterly impossible to me now. They were not in those youthful days. I wasn't yet twenty.

I plainly see myself in an event one night after we had been to a music-hall show, with Eugene Sandow performing. Shaw Tomkins was bright and happy, and the gayest teetotaler in the world. On this particular evening I had been drinking strong lager beer, and in our bedroom I insisted on standing on my head to show how steady I was, but came down with a crash on the floor. It was no good. I could not stand on my head.

The following year our journeys took us to Dresden, where we spent hours among pictures. What days for an artist youth! Then on to Schiller's home, to Rudolstadt, Lichtenfels, Nuremberg, Coburg and Neustadt. In village after village in the Thüringer Wald we went into peasant homes and saw families working on toy animals. These were in papier-mâché, delivered by the gross to each family, who, between them, for months, painted and finished them from day to day. For instance, if a lion were the subject, the models were dipped into a bath of buff-coloured liquid. Grosses of these stood in rows, drying on tables. Then a member of the family would paint only the dark mane and end of the tail. Another, in turn, stuck in the eyes, and yet another painted the pink mouth, and so on. In these places you meet strong girls, carrying, hooked on both shoulders, enormous baskets filled with dolls or animals, either going to or from the factory. Once we met a broad-built, rosy-looking girl thus laden. The holder on one shoulder had given way and the toys were spilled all over the street. We stopped and helped her to pick them up. Her smile was wonderful.

On these journeys with Shaw Tomkins I was his guest. Our last jaunt was when I was well on in my twenties. On that occasion we travelled home through Switzerland to Paris, and there I called on my old friends at Julian's in their large and grimy studio in the Rue de Seine. I can never pay sufficient homage to my old friend, long since gone, for those early travels.

V

LITHOGRAPHIC ARTISTS

BUT this is far from that artists' room where Shaw Tomkins so often sprang in on us in our long painter blouses, each sitting on a tall stool.

In those days the lithographic artist, now almost extinct, was quite an individual, and it seemed to me that the more brilliant he was, the more curious and intemperate were his habits.

Here I am referring to one called Tricket, a Yorkshireman, who was a most wonderful performer on the stones, and would stipple for days twelve or more colour impressions on as many stones; yellow first, flesh tint next, red next, then crimson, then pale blue and greys, followed by dark blue, brown and so on. At the top of each stone were what were called register marks, so that when the proof was being pulled, one colour after another, a needle pierced the register marks of the proofs on to the same marks on the stones, ensuring that each colour impression fitted exactly on the last. This was most important. Yet I have seen Tricket, far from sober, doing this delicate work. He had his bouts, and took a great deal of snuff.

Mr Macready, grey, sober and proper, always neat and clean, looked after me in my beginnings. He told me of *Lorna Doone*. What a book for a youth! He was my literary adviser, and soon I was full of Tennyson, Scott, Dumas, Thackeray.

This was one side of my life, the School of Art being the other. Again a kind man's face comes forward from all those of the past as I seek him out. He was the headmaster, Walter Scott, an honest soul if ever there was one; perhaps more often in my mind than any other friend of that period, for he made me see values, tones and shadow shapes. He lectured us on being sincere and being serious with our studies. Whatever we did we should do well, and not 'play about'. This patient, persevering man was a contemporary of George Clausen's, and studied with him at Kensington in his youth.

Scott, first and foremost of my guides, had a steady, hazel eye, which looked at you from under brown eyebrows. His light brown beard was clipped; he wore a full moustache; his hair was well brushed, and his homespun suit a shade of brown.

I hear him now, showing me this and that shadow shape or reflected light in an antique. He lived in a comfortable home in Queen's Road, Norwich, and

well I knew it, for I often stayed there a night when I lived away in Suffolk in later years. His wife, a homely soul, with bright eyes and Warwickshire accent, adored and looked after him like a child. They had no family. 'Worlter' she called him. He was prone to bronchitis, and in the winter she buttoned him up and wrapped a wool comforter round his neck and bade him good-bye at the front door, saying, 'Be careful how you go, Worlter', or, 'I may look in and call for you this afternoon'. Scott would walk away with his bowler hat slightly forward and on one side, looking fresh, rosy and happy. His appearance was a testimony to the good wife in the background.

'Munnings,' Scott used to say, 'whatever you do, remember the tone.' He may know that I'm writing this. I hope he does.

'I 'ope,' as old Milton, living here at Withypool, always replies when I leave him with the words, 'See you soon.'

There was also teaching in the antique room a Miss Gertrude Offord. Her name was always in the Academy catalogues of the eighties and nineties, for she was a famous water-colour painter of flowers. Those large, imperial-sized creations of peonies, roses or dahlias were rich and fully washed in, strong, fresh and brilliant. I saw them, second to none, on the thickly hung walls of the water-colour room when I went up to the Academy of the days of Leighton, Millais, Herkomer, Forbes and the rest.

Tall, middle aged, looking younger than she was, she had a clever, aesthetic face. She wore a fringe, and her strong, dark, wavy hair, slightly grey, was parted in the middle. Her nose was purely aquiline, and the plainly marked eyebrows were often raised in humorous astonishment as she beamed at you with intelligent grey eyes, always holding the tip of her pencil to her lips as she talked. She had clever hands, and was ready to help you when necessary. For the greater part of six years I worked under her. I can well remember her ways of teaching and correcting. She had a quick eye. What lessons she gave in water-colour painting! Her enthusiasm was as great as her skill. She was part of those old rooms which have long since passed out of use as an Art School.

The Norwich School of Art was above the Free Library, reached by a broad, well-trodden stone staircase. It had a pleasant, studious atmosphere which for some unexplained reason made me want to work. Beautiful, diffused top lighting by day and gaslight at night made work a joy. The faded grey colouring of the rooms was a perfect background to everything - students in blouses working at easels, large casts of Greek and Roman fragments with slight dust settlements on top surfaces, aged castor-oil plants in green tubs.

In the model room groups of plaster casts of cubes, cylinders, vases, triangles, all white, were placed on boards, remaining there for students making laboriously shaded studies. My artistic career began when my eyes were opened to all the never-ending wonders of perspective and light and shade seen in such a group.

From this room, where a master called Sims and a Miss Holmes were in charge, I moved on to the antique room. Here was another landmark. I started

with light and shade from an ornamental bas-relief, in black and white. I did many of these, some in sepia. What a lot I learned from Miss Offord! Then, reaching greater heights, stretching a double elephant sheet of thick Watman paper, I began a sepia from the Trajan Scroll, and worked at it until it was all but stereoscopic in appearance.

My next task was the never-to-be-forgotten horse's head from the Parthenon; and all through the hours of work at lithography from nine till seven I lived only to go on with that splendid horse's head in sepia from seven to nine! The hours spent on it each evening slipped away too fast, but they were not wasted, for I learned all I know of a horse's head from that cast. Alas! my memory often fails. Sculptors have copied it, used it, repeated it all the world over. It is alive, and belongs to an age of horses and great sculpture.

Memory recalls my first antique figure, the Discobolus. So, with plumb line, proportion, anatomy, I went on from one figure to another. I can't think why I never did the Venus de Milo. She was there, and I was reminded of those days only last week, when I found myself visiting the Taunton School of Art and saw there this lovely figure placed, perhaps by accident, in a most interesting lighting, near a window. What an inspiration! What a task for the student able to draw! Such a beautiful statue is better practice for the beginner than any shifting human model.

Then to the painting room. Having painted still-life groups in water-colour and gained confidence in exams, I began in oils. All artists must surely recall their first effort in oils. But I was under good folk who knew their medium and had been trained in traditional methods of paint, and gradually I learned how to use it. Ever since then I have been trying and trying, and find my life almost gone. How it has gone! When did it speed its fastest? — I am unable to say.

Art is long, life is short. Masfield once sent me a copy of his 'Daffodil Fields' with this written on the fly-leaf:

Man with his burning soul
Hath but an hour of breath
To build a ship of Truth
On which his soul may sail,
Sail on a sea of death.
For death takes toll
Of beauty, courage, youth,
Of all but Truth.

Last, but not least, was the life room, and there the more advanced students worked twice a week. There I met the head artist from the other lithographic firm where I first applied for a job, a Mr Sydney Howitt. A real Victorian; a good artist and draughtsman, besides being a character. He was a man of sixty, with a rubicund face, a largish, grey moustache, real mutton-chop whiskers and hair parted in the middle. He belonged to the du Maurier period; rather like an elderly Taffy out of *Trilby*, still carrying on a sort of tradition of the old Norwich School.

VI

BUNGAY RACES

It justly happened that a certain Ralph Wernham, a Government Inspector of Post Offices, who made me read books and poetry, took me to plays, shared the greatest day of my life. On that stupendous day, just before eight o'clock, as I was about to rise, he tapped at my bedroom door and walked in with two letters in his hand, saying, 'Here are two notices from the Academy; behold the red letters on the back! One to say you have something hung, the other that something is out!'

The secret was out. On the advice of Mr Scott, my headmaster, I had sent two works to the Royal Institute of Painters in Water-Colour, and had them accepted. On his further advice I followed this up, not telling another soul, by sending three oils to the Royal Academy.

Knowing nothing, and being innocent of the ways of that great unknown institution, I little dreamt that these two letters lay waiting on the breakfast table. Wernham – who was always down first – being a post office official, knew at once their meaning and, guessing what I had done and bringing me those letters, he not only prepared me for the contents, but shared in the tremendous excitement when I opened them and found I had two in and one out!

Could such a thing be possible? Here was I, a raw, simple, provincial youth, knowing nothing of the great Royal Academy, receiving on this Thursday before the Varnishing Day – which was without a doubt on the following Monday – a surprise and a thrill such as I have never since experienced, or ever will again. When I became an A.R.A., or even President, I did not feel the same overwhelming joy that was mine that morning.

As I recovered my balance and began to dress, my good friend said, 'On such an occasion as this you must not go to business: this is the first day of Bungay Races, and you are coming with me.'

Here was a poser! Nobody had telephones then. I hesitated, then suddenly decided to go, for what did anything matter now that I had two pictures hung in the Royal Academy? And so we got into a first-class carriage of the race train (my first luxury journey), and soon found ourselves walking with a crowd to the common and the stands.

My first real race-meeting! There were picturesque gipsies: two tall, handsome sisters, the Grays, with their mother, Kiomi, whom I afterwards knew, and who was once model to Frederick Sandys. She could talk of 'Mr Rossetti' and 'Mr Millais' and others by the hour, and told how she posed to Sandys for his picture of 'The Prophetess', keeping her eyes fixed for hours on one point as he drew. The tall daughters were slim, brown, dark and magnificent in black silk, large black feathered hats and gold ear-rings. Nelly, the elder, had the best caravan – all green and gold – that I ever saw.

But I must keep to the meeting. Wernham, wearing a brown bowler, pepper-and-salt covert coat, race-glasses and white gardenia, went off to bet on the first race, leaving me to go where I pleased, with a pass in or out of the enclosure. This was a plunge into the most vividly coloured phase of life I had so far seen. I had known horse sales in Norwich, local races and regattas; but what were they compared to this vast fair and meeting combined on Bungay Common?

There were roundabouts, shooting-galleries, swinging-boats and coconut shies; large eating- and drinking-tents, flags flying, and thousands of oranges blazing on stalls in the sun. I had never seen such droves of ponies and gipsy lads. But all this, with music and noise, died away and dwindled to nothing when I saw the thoroughbred horses and jockeys – professional and gentlemen riders (riding with a proper length, and not with the short leathers of to-day) – in bright silk colours, going off down the course.

So imagine me, gaping at the scene now thrown at me all at once. The peaceful School of Art, the smelly artists' room faded away, and I began to live! I had never imagined such a sight, although my imagination went as far as prairie fires.

And so race followed race, steeplechase or hurdle, while I stood either at the open ditch or water-jump seeing such colour and action as I had never dreamed of. So ended my first race day.

Wernham, who had betted on each race, was only five pounds to the good, and meant to follow it up and improve on the morrow at the second day. He took me out to dinner that night with my head full of jockeys in silks against the sky, of horses racing at and flying over great fences.

More was to follow. Next morning he tapped at my door and said, 'You must come racing again.' I didn't refuse. Nothing mattered. I was an artist with two pictures hung in the Academy! Besides, my time in the lithographic business was shortly to end, and I was to start painting and burn my boats.

We went again, Wernham winning money on a horse called Longcloth, and I seeing a horse lying dead with a broken neck. The noise of the fair was as great and the sun on the striped awnings and oranges as flaming and brilliant as before, the turf on the common springy and full of scents, with skylarks above.

Thus ended two great days in my life, and soon after I did a set of four pastels – the jumps, the finish and all the rest – and sold them for what I thought was a lot of money.

Later on my kind friend wrote a wonderful column about my pictures being hung, which appeared in the *Eastern Daily Press* and put me in the limelight. Once he took me with him to see his old college at Cambridge, and gave me another royal day when we went to Epsom and I saw my first Derby from the stand.

What a day for me, seeing those vast crowds and all the coaches and vehicles coming on to the Downs! We went from Victoria, and walked across to the stands. That was Flying Fox's year, and the grey French horse, Holocaust, ridden by Tod Sloane, with the new monkey-seat, broke his fetlock and was destroyed.

But that crowded, gigantic occasion at Epsom had not the colour of Bungay. Perhaps I was pinned in the vast stand for too long and was not inclined to get into the crowd. To see Epsom one must be on the members' stand and have access to the course and get back and forth to the paddock. The crowd, like that of the Grand National, is becoming beyond human endurance.

Some years ago Miss Helen Mackie, the artist, told me that Wernham was a cousin of hers and that he was dead. No wonder I felt a cloud across the sun – a dreary moment – as she told me this. He was a scholar and a gentleman – and he smoked too many cigarettes. He may, in turn, be at my elbow now as I write. I wonder.

VII

R.A. PICTURES AND SUFFOLK MARSHES

WHAT of those first Academy pictures of mine?

I will begin with the unlucky one of three sent in – the real ambitious effort. It was called 'Evening on the Suffolk Marshes', and was intended to be a famous and immortal masterpiece. Imagine me then, full of the youthful ardour of ambitious seventeen, in the stable yard at my old home; an easel of some sort – I quite forget now what it was like – a canvas four feet six inches by three feet; a black japanned paint-box, with the old long, narrow tubes in it, on the ground. My design is ready on the canvas, and I am listening anxiously, waiting for a horse! I hear its step drawing near: a boy has gone to fetch it from the meadow, and now Teddy Holmes – that's his name – appears leading a large white cart-mare on a halter.

I stand her where I want her, get back to my easel, and with men's faces looking out of the mill windows and doors I begin to paint. I am full of bottled-up desire to do this, after a year's restraint in the Norwich artists' room; for I have not been able to paint a horse out of doors in oils since my August holiday of last year.

I can see the mare now as if it were only yesterday, with the boy Teddy holding her. The white sides of the mill with its windows are behind. I see Sam Notley's face with spectacles on, and his son Albert peering out of the door at me, astounded at the size of such a canvas. I see the pigs snouting about in the straw and manure in the muck-bin. It is a placid, grey day. The boy stands holding the mare hour after hour. He has an old straw hat on his head, is in his shirt-sleeves and keeps the flies away from the patient model with a spray of elder.

I am doing all that I have yearned to do for months. A lovely white mare standing there for me, and although I am not master of my paint, I have no doubts of this being a masterpiece, and revel in every stroke which models the shape of quarters, neck and head. The white on the back and top of those quarters isn't white: the subtle grey tones are indescribable – what colour!

Difficulties pile up, but I am undaunted. Old Notley creeps round behind to take a look. Ephraim Butcher – the pig man, as he is called – stands and has a good stare. Later comes my father, driving home in his trap. He takes a glance and, like a good father, says nothing, but looks thoughtful as he walks away.

And so I began my great work, which I quite thought was easily going to win the first prize in the School of Art holiday competition. The white mare was the central horse in my arrangement of design. Two darker ones, rubbing noses, were to be standing farther back, which were only suggested there, to be put in when I could have the actual models, which was after their work. All went well. The picture was carried into the North meadow to do my foreground, distance and sky, with a horse held there, too, for values; for I had been told the all-important business of relation of one thing to another. So I went on from height to height, until I made the crude mistake of bringing a horse into the right side of the picture in the foreground and cutting it in halves – a handsome horse he was, too, called Briton, a dark chestnut. This cutting in half was my own intention, and nothing about it seemed wrong; I staked everything on the picture, feeling sure of a first prize at the school.

I was only awarded a second; and when the students were gathered together at the exhibition, Mr Scott's remarks were followed with eagerness and attention as he came to my 'Suffolk Marshes'. He pointed out its virtues and all the rest.

'But', said he, 'you can't cut a horse in half in the foreground like that. Besides, it is coming in profile into the picture. Were it in a crowded fair or cavalry charge it would be different.'

At this all my ambitions faded out, and my large picture was not a masterpiece, after all.

Two years later I sent it to the Academy with the title 'Evening on the Suffolk Marshes' – a real Academy title of the day. Landscapes were given wonderful titles then, such as 'When lingering daylight welcomes night's pale green' or 'The moon is up and yet it is not night'. This picture was one of the three sent to the Academy for my first venture, and was the one they did not hang.

It was skied in my second attempt the year following; and as I stood gazing up at it in its place near a doorway, I heard again the monotonous cry of the corncrake, which became so familiar during those hours when I painted the distant marsh on August evenings. I must have looked a queer youth at those Varnishing Days, in what I thought were decent clothes.

Now for the two pictures which were hung. First and foremost was 'Stranded', placed on the line in the Gem Room. It sold for the great amount of fourteen guineas, to Sir W. H. Wills. This canvas was eighteen by fourteen, and it was influenced by a small painting I had seen, early in March of that year, in a gallery in Amsterdam when travelling with my friend Shaw Tomkins.

The painting was of a little girl in a pale blue overall, wearing a black stocking cap, and sitting on a sand dune. I liked that picture very much, with

the bright sunlight on the blue dress, and it all came back to me at home in that August holiday, when I saw my young cousin Nina wearing just such a blue smock frock and stocking cap. Nina was about twelve, and had a twin brother Cecil. They were the children of my mother's sister – the gay and youthful Aunt Rosa of the early days at Walsham Hall. As a child I had seen my aunt at her wedding breakfast and had eaten those sweet, creamy, sherry-tasting syllabubs, and now I was painting her twins of twelve or fourteen – I was then between eighteen and nineteen.

With these two as models, I was full of ideas, and put them in a boat, the boy in the front seat, the girl on the middle one, myself in the stern, steering, and made them row me down the mill-stream, round the corner of the North meadow to the left, until we came to shallows and clumps of dark-green rushes with brown heads, which we lovers of rivers know so well. Then bright green sedges thrust against the bows, and the boy and girl began to lift an oar and push or pull it in through the rowlock. Watching this, I saw my picture, my arrangement, just as they were!

The boat was soon fastened, my canvas set on the easel, and my palette got ready for the start. I was smitten through with the newness of it all. I had seen that little picture in Amsterdam, and now I was going to try to do something here with these children in front of me in the wide-beamed, steady boat, with the August growth along the banks, and the river filled and grown up with glossy, dark masses of rush and sedge. So to the everlasting song of the warblers, sitting in the stern of the boat, easel fixed, I began my picture.

I believe I worked with the sun slightly on the left. I was so happy – never had I dreamt of painting fair hair and face in the sun with black stocking cap – and when I began the pale-blue pinafore dress I called out, 'Sit quite still, Nina' – 'You, Cecil; don't move while I place you'. 'Good girl!' I kept saying; and – 'Now rest awhile.' 'Cecil, don't move; I'm painting you; keep your head like that!' Besides these sitters, there was the background of the river-banks and, farther away, an ancient thorn-fence in mellow August colouring, and beyond, about half a mile distant, fields on the north side of the valley, and willows in between, far or near. I speak of these from love of it all, although they were only background, as was the warbler's ceaseless song.

This picture looked so small when I last saw it at a retrospective exhibition of my work in Norwich in the twenties. I had thought it quite a fair-sized one when I painted it.

The work went on for three mornings. My finishing touches were the light on one of the oars and a yellow water-lily lying on the floor-boards of the boat between myself and Nina as she faced my way. It lay near her small foot, and helped the composition – I forget now if I left it there. I called the picture 'Stranded'. The spot where I worked was near the bathing-place, where, as boys, we pulled up the dark-green rushes with their white ends, packed and tied them together in thick, buoyant bundles, and learned to swim on them. This bathing lasted for hours, and what noise we all made! What happy days!

The painting of the picture was infinite bliss, and brought with it further joys and satisfaction when it was hung and when I actually stood there in the Gem Room, on my first Varnishing Day, having at last found it, seeing that it looked quite well on the wall among the other pictures.

My story of the second picture that was sent and hung is entirely different, and of a different place and time.

At the School of Art I was already painting still life in oils, and soon began, on Saturday afternoons, to carry out box and easel to the country for landscape; but I badly wanted to find a model and do a figure somewhere outside. My ideas never failed me then – I had a bright one.

In the press room downstairs two men were always at work, graining and polishing the stones for the artists to use in their lithographic labours. These two men, like many of those in the works, were great characters. One, the older of the two, a clean-shaved, ancient, horsey-looking cove, called Russell, worked as a drover in the Cattle Market on Saturdays. I used to go and see him there, looking an entirely different individual. The other and younger man was 'Jumbo' Betts – a real kind, humorous soul, who could put a wonderful polish on a stone, large or small. I can see him now, laying the steel straight-edge along the surface of a large sixty by forty. Jumbo became a friend of mine. He lived in a low haunt of the city, called Pockthorpe, not far from the Cavalry Barracks. Mousehold Heath was only just above this parish, and 'Jumbo' had a portion on the allotments up there.

This time it must have been Millet's pictures that gave me an idea; but, whatever the cause, I arranged with 'Jumbo' to go round to his house with my things on a Saturday afternoon in November, and we both toiled up to his allotment, where he posed for me digging all the afternoon and again on the Sunday following.

Another memory: the digging figure, purple cabbages, yellowing leaves of fruit-bushes, the rising ground beyond – almost my first serious attempt at out-of-door figure-painting. 'Jumbo' still stands there in that picture in somebody's house – he stands there in my mind, too, today. I believe the canvas was only eighteen by fourteen, with 'Winsor and Newton' stamped on the back, and I enjoyed the painting of this in the still November afternoon with all the thrills of eager youth and inexperience.

Having tried my friend 'Jumbo' in the allotment picture, I then had a more brilliant idea of using him. We arranged to take our lunch with us, and to leave on a Saturday directly work was over at one o'clock, carrying with us my things all the way to the river at Lakenham. This meant walking a considerable distance through by-lanes and straggling suburbs to Lakenham Mill.

Imagine a quiet, chill, January-afternoon, a grey sky, a sluggish, narrow river between rows of bare pollarded willows, with pale dead reeds and sedges along either bank. Then came the arrival at this quiet, forlorn spot of two men, the one a stone polisher, the other an artist. We disturbed coots, which flew clucking away, skimming the water with long, thin feet. This and the cawing

of distant rooks were the only sounds to break the winter sleep of that cold, still river. We hurriedly ate our food and drank some old beer which 'Jumbo' had carried all the way.

He then cut a long, slim willow pole, and posed with coat collar turned up, pipe in mouth, as a man fishing. This being a small picture, I carried it through in a painting, while 'Jumbo' every now and then stamped his feet on the ground until the soil quaked, beating himself with his arms to keep warm.

Dear old 'Jumbo'! What a good soul! There he stood as the winter day drew on, fishing with no line, an old tin can by his side for imaginary bait. How cold we were when we packed up and started for Norwich, and how glad 'Jumbo' was to have that long-promised drink at Lakenham Cock!

This picture, called 'Pike-fishing in January', was hung on the line, and sold for ten guineas – a vast sum. So ends my story of those first two pictures hung at the Academy, and of the larger one which was not hung and which failed in being a masterpiece. Later I will relate how it found a home, but next I wish to write of my lithographic work.

VIII

LITHOGRAPHIC DESIGNS

My lithographic work had grown, from year to year, more and more interesting. There may have been spasms of youthful rebellion and idleness. I may have grown tired of it, with only one fortnight's holiday a year. Fourteen short, precious days in Suffolk by the river, among horses and country folk, out of the three hundred and sixty-five, were not many. How I kept up any flow of ideas and designs, or how I stood the long hours from nine till seven, year in and year out, I do not know. It is certain that it takes a lot of work to kill a youth or a man.

As those years went on my designs must have brought a great deal of business to Page Bros & Co. Ltd, of Norwich, for I often had more work handed to me than I could cope with. The manager might come with a packet of papers and ask me to leave what I was doing and get out a rough design at once, as it was urgent, so much so that unless it were done by tomorrow, some other firm which had already submitted quotations and designs for the advertising of the commodity might get the order. These often went to many thousands of copies. The design might be for lemonade – chocolates – mustard – whisky – pills – even for poultry foods or election posters. Yet whatever I was then doing would have to be left, and the other started, which meant that I must stir up my imagination and think hard to get an idea – something for printing in three or more colours, something effective and with good spacing. A well-used brain soon starts off – mine did then – and I always had a design ready, and more often than not the firm got the order.

Now and then I made a hit. One of my designs of that day was all over London on every hoarding just after 1918. It was for Caley's Christmas Crackers – a tall, upright poster showing Elizabethan 'prentice boys in red running up a street in the snow. The arrangement is right; and looking at it today in smaller size – I still have the sketch – I realize that my School of Art training in the antique and life gave me advantages. Another reason for being able to deal with these designs was that I continually went on from one thing to another, and became trained to invent and draw out of my head without the model. Practice is the thing, and many difficulties are mastered through it.

All this may suggest I was a sort of wonder, but alas! I had the failings of youth. I was lazy, and would have been worse but for the discipline of business.

How happy I was when I had a new batch of cracker-box tops to do! There was a thin kind of paper known as double crown which we had for sketch designs as a rule. With a quick charcoal rough-out and then powdered colours ground by hand, I made my design in a morning, and often did two a day – always with the knowledge that my good friend Shaw Tomkins, at Caley's next door, would come in with his quick step and bright smile and approve of what I had done. I can recall but few instances of disapproval.

On one occasion, towards Christmas, we all hoped for presents of chocolates. I did a drawing of the room and ourselves standing in a half-circle round the manager, a Mr Lanham, who wore a black velvet skull-cap. It shows him as a schoolmaster and ourselves as grown-up boys. He was questioning us.

'Boys,' he says, 'why is Mr Tomkins a very nice man?'

'Because he always sends us chocolates for Christmas,' is the reply.

This was sent, carefully wrapped, to Caley's and, sure enough, a day or two before Christmas eight large boxes of chocolates arrived, one for each of us.

My portraits of those artists are correct, and on looking at the drawing now I smile – alas! I smile sadly, for it takes me back to those long hours in that well-lit room where I played and worked, and where I kept a book of Moxon's works of Tennyson under my desk, and where I learned the whole of 'Locksley Hall' by heart, 'The Lady of Shalott', 'The Miller's Daughter' – which incidentally I illustrated for the Norwich Art Circle black-and-white exhibition. 'Mariana in the Moated Grange' was my favourite, and long since then, reading Fitzgerald's letters, I find that he places this as one of Tennyson's best. 'The Passing of Arthur', 'Blow, Bugle, Blow' and many more were stored in my head – my memory was in training. I was so full of Tennyson that I made a small boy – a printer's boy – learn 'The Poet's Song', which he used to repeat to me at intervals until he grew too big to mix lithographic ink, and another boy came.

The rain had fallen, the Poet arose,
He pass'd by the town and out of the street.
A light wind blew from the gates of the sun,
And waves of shadow went over the wheat.

I was always a reader, and could get any book I wanted from the Free Library, below the School of Art. I began life in that room at the age of fourteen and went on until I was twenty, reading a lot in my spare time. Yet it is difficult for me to say which novel of all those I read then I liked the most.

Vanity Fair, although for grown-ups, came first. But I never liked the author's illustrations. Their coarseness interferes with a reader's conception of the characters. I see Becky Sharp as a lovely creature, and Amelia, too. Again and again have I read it, and at each reading see more and more strokes of genius. The funeral of Sir Pitt Crawley is one. What a scene! When the hearse

and empty carriages drive away. When they are out of sight and halt at the inn, with the sunlight glinting on the pewter-pots in the road.

Many of Scott's novels had been read out to us by our mother in earlier days, but I re-read *The Fair Maid of Perth*, *Kenilworth*, *Rob Roy* and others, and then not with the full appreciation they deserved.

Bleak House was a favourite, and left its mark on my mind. What descriptions! The chambers of Tulkinghorn, the lawyer; the shot in the night; his end, and afterwards as he lay there in the room. A book full of artistry, of dark moods, of forlorn park-lands – Dickens at his best.

Books were being published and read then which everyone talked of. Could we read Edna Lyall today? Only from sheer curiosity I might make a start with *Donovan*, yet it had a great sale, and its author made a name for herself. Another book which was a part of that period was *The Sorrows of Satan*. Marie Corelli was quite somebody in her day, which reminds me that through that story I won a competition for a design advertising bicycles.

A paper called *The Cyclist* offered a prize of three guineas for the best design advertising Waverley cycles. In Page Bros & Co.'s time I did a drawing on a large white card; on the top was the wording 'Waverley Cycles'; below was Satan facing you and sitting cross-legged on a milestone, glowering, in a rage, elbows on knees, his chin in his hands, and his tail curving away behind the milestone. Up the twisted, curving road was a merry cyclist looking back at Satan, waving his cap as he rode clear of pursuit up the hill, leaving a track which also curved down to the bottom drawing. The caption underneath was: 'Satan's latest sorrow – those who ride Waverleys defy pursuit'. This was sent in for competition, and behold, a week later I found I had won first prize – three guineas – and my design came out in *The Cyclist*.

Norwich Art Circle, holding a black-and-white exhibition each spring, in addition to their autumn show of pictures, gave me something to work for. Quite a large wash drawing of Barnaby Rudge and the raven had a place of honour in the exhibition. This was the period of costume that I liked best of all. Many an evening did I sit late over the dining-room table at Mrs Stubbs', after the others had gone to bed, working on imagined pictures of conspirators in dark avenues, of Burns' maidens standing beneath lowering skies, by roaring torrents, which had verses in the catalogue or written in the margin.

My largest of these was full-toned and dramatic, and looked like an engraving, in its lined mount and frame. The girl in this picture was my ideal – my conception of a heroine of romance. Its title, from Burns, was 'Around me howls a wintry sky', etc. One more was of a country couple, staring in the moonlight at a female phantom with outstretched arms, and lovely head thrown back, appealing to the stars, her white robes trailing on the still water reflecting her luminous figure and the sickle moon. This was called 'The Haunted Mere'.

The mounts for these were always cut at the works, and I lined them myself, most beautifully, in Page Bros & Co.'s time.

Of all the six artist comrades working in that room only one, a certain Phil Presents, used to sketch out of doors, go to the Art School, or exhibit at the Art Circle. He was an enthusiast and helped me on, and often we sat, working in water colours, by the river at Eaton or Earham or in the cathedral close.

There were times when the whole room used to sing in parts and wail in sad, harmonious unison like hounds in a kennel; for the hours after two o'clock were long. It happened rarely, but it is a recollection I can't miss. There, on a November evening, with the dusk outside and noise of printing machinery below, we might, in various attitudes on our stools, be seen and heard making harmony. I cannot think why at times we all behaved like boys and sang 'Sweet Genevieve' together and 'Belle Mahone' – 'Wait for me at Heaven's gate, swe-eet Belle Ma-hone'. This was done with all the feeling we possessed. We did it to perfection if I had brought in with me two round, flask-shaped bottles of wine called 'Canary Sack' from a grocery stores near by.

Some lines which I remember so well –

Soon beyond the harbour bar
Shall my barque be sailing far . . .

and then:

Wait for me at Heaven's gate,
Swe-eet Belle Mahone.

It is impossible to describe the melancholy of the chorus.

Why I am sad now at the thought of us doing this is hard to say. Although large and spacious, and of a good length, this room, with the gaslight and large green shades throwing a pool of light on the work in hand at each desk; with those artists of various ages, who came each to his particular stool every morning and took his money each Saturday at one o'clock, sitting there tuning away in alto, treble and bass, makes a picture that somehow stirs up saddest memory.

One of these men often had bouts of drinking. They put me in my place on occasions, for I was doing work which they could not, and bringing poster and other figure-design work to a firm that had never before done anything of the kind. For all that, they were my friends, advisers, sympathizers, and we seldom had differences of any kind, and all were good-humoured. How we laughed at times, in spite of the long hours!

But all things come to an end. I was determined to leave this room immediately I had served my six years, which ended soon after the great occasion and excitement of my first pictures being hung at the Academy.

A month afterwards, on a Saturday, at the age of twenty, I took my last week's wages, the manager vainly offering me five pounds a week – a fortune then – to stay on. I bade him and the others farewell, promising always to look in when I came to Norwich. This I did, and once, to satisfy my pride, I rode into the yard on a horse which was held by a printer's lad as I swaggered up into the dear old room – and felt a queer feeling inside, that if I wasn't careful

pride would meet a fall! I often had to fight this strange feeling as I improved my position in life, for my beginning had been humble, although happy – happier than any time later, even when standing watching the Derby from the Members' Stand, or selling a picture for lots of money.

And so good-bye to my last lodgings with Mrs Stubbs, good-bye to the walk every morning to Page Bros – leaving at twenty to nine, passing by Mr Reeve's house with the Cotmans, passing over the river, looking at the arches of Bishops Bridge farther up, or at wherries and barges on the other side. Good-bye to Rose Lane, to the walk past Spelman's yard and the Bell Hotel, to St Stephen's by the ancient thatched Boar's Head, by the butcher's shop and the narrow, ancient passage, to the doors with 'Page Bros & Co. Ltd, Lithographers, Printers, Box Makers, etc.' written upon them in plain letters; – doors which I had gone in and out four times a day – excepting Saturday, when it was only twice – for six long years. This walking to and from business had become a habit, and now it was all ended; finished.

IX

STILL WORKING FOR CALEY'S

BEING cut off from other artists, I was at times lonely. Listless moments came when I sat there, disinclined or unable to work, hearing a wagon of hay pass by, or the ring of the anvil, or sounds and voices in the village. I was twenty. The only capital I possessed in the world, my savings, dwindled fast, and began to disappear as my carpenter's shop grew into a studio, and although I lived at home for a while, I could not exist on what I might chance to sell. Therefore I continued to do poster designs and advertising work.

Much of this was for my staunch old friend, Shaw Tomkins, who, being keen on a deal, often cut me down to a low figure for designs for cracker-box tops. Why so generous and merry a soul got such fun out of this I can't say; but when I stood out for my figure, explaining how difficult it was to think of original designs, he would roar with laughter and accuse me of being too sharp! In the end we agreed on fifty shillings for each design – there were dozens to do. Ten came to twenty-five pounds – a lot of money then.

Tomkins would pay a flying visit from Norwich. At Harleston station I met him with a horse and trap and drove him to Mendham. There in the studio we haggled over shillings. Finally he always bought a water-colour or two and sketches, which healed the wound of the hard business deal, and next day would find me hard at it before a sloping easel, with designs thick on the floor around. These were done in three colours and black outline as a rule. But what names the crackers were given! Caley's Primrose Crackers, Caley's Double Violet Crackers, Caley's Long and Short Crackers, Classic Crackers, Seashore Crackers, Deep-sea Crackers. They were endless; all the better for trade.

Many people made money through these designs. I seemed to create with ease; but was this really so? I look back, and know that it was all hard work, which had to be done so that I could live and paint. Why painting should have been the aim, and why I used all this energy so that I could set a palette and paint in oils in the sun and wind, beset by all the distractions of out-of-door work, I do not know. Yet I went on for some years with poster work – and liked doing it – in between my more ambitious aspirations.

What was really difficult was the job of changing over – stepping out of one

method of work and into another entirely different. It was disturbing to get out of a groove, to clear the floor and move things for starting a poster, getting out charcoal, grinding powder-colours on the stone slab. Who but artists – lonely men in one sense – can ever know what this means? It would be as bad for the writer who in the midst of a novel had at last to stop and write journalistic columns, or for an actor manager to put on pantomime! All who are artists will understand. The column may become interesting; but you have to displace and move all your former people and thoughts in the unfinished story laid by, and begin reversing the mind until they are eclipsed.

Intermittently Colman's blue or starch, or Caley's chocolate, took their turn with what I was longing to do, and later I accepted a retaining fee from a large printing-house in London which took me to town often enough to become a member of the Langham Sketch Club in All Souls' Place.

This side line, bringing riches with it, went on apace, so that I continued dipping into my imagination, always hoping and believing there would be one more idea – even as when a jar of pickled shallots is fast shrinking we expect to prong yet one more with the fork.

Gradually, through the Norwich Art Circle and Boswells, a firm of art dealers in that city, my pictures became known and were sold at moderate prices.

Jim Boswell said, 'Sell it and paint another.'

'Quite right, quite right,' said his thoughtful and more refined brother Sam. 'Don't do pot-boilers.'

So spake a brother artist. Temptations to make money were worse than temptations to play.

Boswell's sold antiques and pictures, mostly of the Norwich School, which were hung in a very good top lit gallery. Upstairs was a room full of bottles, brushes and varnish, where old pictures were restored by an expert named Whiting. If I was in Norwich on a visit, and so inclined, in the absence of Mr Whiting, I painted pictures of all kinds in that room, and Boswell bought them for a few guineas. These were pictures of knaves and thieves, of ghosts and folk with lanterns in the snow. One night I saw 'She Stoops to Conquer', so my pictures were of Miss Hardcastle and Tony Lumpkin. I saw 'The School for Scandal', and painted Lady Teazle.

A part of my inconsistent mind was soaked in the costume and foppery of that period. I loved painting three-cornered hats and wigs and women with powdered hair. This making of such pictures for golden sovereigns to spend was, I suppose, a vicious habit, but I not only did this, I was attracted by a fair-haired girl in the shop who could sing, and would often trill like a bird, playing her own accompaniments on a piano standing among chairs, china, tables and pictures. (This would only happen if the Boswells were away.) The manager of the shop – Henry we called him – liked a good song, too, and more than once a ringing top note ended with the entrance of a customer.

That shop became familiar, for each year my pictures were framed and sent

to the Academy from there, and when framed and ready for approval, a small set of would-be connoisseurs and friends would speak their minds about them and wish me luck. Otherwise I kept the business dark, for I dreaded being rejected and out!

I make the space here because when I saw the last sentence written: how *I dreaded being out* of the Academy – not hung, in fact – it looked a bald statement. It gave no hint whatever of those feelings which possessed me when I got the rejection notices, coming as they did after weeks of waiting there in the country. Being old and hardened now, and too familiar with all that happens behind those sacred doors of the Royal Academy, I find it beyond my pen to put in words, perhaps not only for myself but for other artists, the discordance, the jolt, the shock, the pause in life on seeing the notice that such-and-such a work was out.



One of my early designs for Caley's

X

HOW I LOST THE SIGHT OF ONE EYE

To get back to Mendham. Lack of money kept me in that environment. Returning from past pleasures, I was soon restored to virtue at the sight of a horse grazing by the river – thinking, if only I could paint it, with grass, water, sky, *just as it looked!*

A boy in blue shirt, and cord trousers braced up to his armpits, his face shadowed under a wide straw hat, feeding sandy and white fowls clustered about him. A boy fishing from the boat. An old man leading a mare and foal. Thus passed my first summer of independence. Then came a setback which happened just before my twenty-first birthday.

I was staying at Mulbarton, near Norwich, with an aunt and uncle who bred hackneys and farmed in a considerable way. One afternoon when I was out on the farm with a greyhound, a sheepdog and a hound puppy, they began chasing a hare. Two of the dogs went through a thorn fence into a field of swedes. The hound and I got to a hurdle in a corner. I lifted the heavy puppy over the hurdle, and as I dropped it to the ground, a spray of thorn, rebounding, struck my right eye. Sharp pain followed the blow. This was no mere flick against the eyeball. Soon I knew the worst. Standing among the swedes and shutting my left eye, I saw nothing but grey fog.

The local doctor came. He said it was only a blow, and told me to foment it and sent lotion. That night I sang 'The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo', and a Dan Leno song, 'Ours is a 'appy 'ome', in make-up, at a concert in the village school, in aid of something to do with the Boer War. Friends pointed out afterwards that I poisoned the eye with grease-paint. Nothing of the kind. The clever Norwich specialist, Johnson Taylor, soon found what was wrong. A thorn had pierced the lens. The X-ray was young then. I went to London. Something was found in the eye. Things became worse. Johnson Taylor operated and got the speck of something out. For weeks I lay in a nursing-home attended by kind nurses and a cousin of my mother's, who stayed there and read to me all the time. She went through *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and other books.

My right eye was blinded for life. The left eye, which had been affected,

began to settle with the blind eye, and when at last I was allowed to see light, and the time came to go home, I was sorry to leave that Norwich nursing-home – a tall, Georgian house in Surrey Street. What a happy Christmas it was, and what nice women the nurses were! One played the piano, and I sang to her accompaniment – my star turn was 'The Blue Alsatian Mountains'.

I wasn't allowed to use my remaining eye for months afterwards, and when I began to do so I could not judge distances, and poured water on the cloth, missing the glass. I went to paint, and my brush either hit the canvas before I knew it was there, or was not touching it. Mostly it was the latter, and I found myself making stroke after stroke in the air, nearer and nearer, until I touched the painted surface. A long time elapsed before I became used to this, and even now I often make a stroke in the air which doesn't arrive on the canvas, or make another which lands too violently. This has been a handicap to me always, and cramps my style – shortens my stride, so to speak. What wouldn't I give to see with two eyes again!

We know that a painter often closes one eye to look at a thing. When studying at Julian's in Paris, a few years later, students used to say it was a good fault to have one eye – I needn't close the other when I held the plumb-line before the model.

Johnson Taylor – a wizard, my saviour and benefactor – told me that I had had the most perfect sight before, and that with care the only eye would grow strong and stand the work. With journeying to town and the X-ray fees of that period, the expenses of the operation and the nursing-home for myself and dear old cousin Ellen, who read to me, all my savings were swept away.

Then I started again, on large poster designs of lovely girls in large hats, for Caley's chocolates. My models were a dark-eyed, attractive cousin and a friend, who came to stay. The cousin had beautiful arms and black hair, and was a flirt, and her name was May.

This work and much more of its kind soon brought the banking account up again to what I considered a safe sum; about seventy pounds. It seldom got higher or lower, and I felt rich with that amount in Barclays at Harlestone.

I picture that bank on the corner now. It was there I used to go as a youth with bags of gold and silver from my father. I see George Stebbings – Mr Stebbings to me then – behind the shiny mahogany counter. His round nose shone, his gold eyeglasses shone, his rather red moustaches swept out with a twist from the centre. He was almost beginning a double chin, and his face was rubicund and cheerful. A ring with a seal was on his finger, and altogether he was a proper, kindly, sprightly sort of country bank manager; and, as I've said before, he made appearances on certain nights at the Swan Hotel and, if encouraged, always sang "True, true till death".

'Well, Alfred my boy, and how's your father?'

'He's quite well, thank you, Mr Stebbings.'

'And your mother?'

'She's well, too.'

Then, with the ring showing, he tilted up the money-bag, and golden sovereigns poured out on the counter, while those fingers of his deftly pushed the coins about and built them into piles. Bags of silver came next – large crown-pieces, florins, shillings – which his two sets of fingers worked into more piles. Then with a small brass shovel he scooped up all the piles of money and put it in drawers behind the counter.

This was my early remembrance of him, and as I banked there until I was well over forty – even after his retirement – my acquaintance grew from timid replies to his inquiries of 'How's your father?' to a very jovial fellowship at the Swan years afterwards. I should add that when in his best shining moments, his attitude was with feet apart and thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. His appearance at a concert was superb. His pose was in the grand manner: starched shirt, starched tie, white gloved hands holding out the song at arm's length, his head thrown back, the light on his gold glasses and nose. His son grew up like the father, and played chess with me many an evening.

Long afterwards, in years of opulence, the son found me the only man-servant I've ever had, whose name was Cooper. Cooper called himself fifty, but was nearer seventy, and he loved answering the telephone, 'Mr Munnings' servant speaking'. He was much given to a dark and weighty remark: 'Watch Japan!'

About then – in the March after my accident, I believe it was – a new and independent phase began. The curtain rises. The scene: my new rooms in a farmhouse at the top corner of the village street, called Shearing's Farm. It was a typical Suffolk farmhouse, plastered and buff-washed, with a moss-grown, brown-tiled roof. It had a time-honoured and settled look about it. A row of green posts and chains stood the length of its road frontage. Stock-yards, buildings and barns were in a square at the back, and a high flint wall shut off the kitchen garden from the village.

In an account of old Mendham and the various farming families during the 'sixties, my mother has written about the Mrs Shearing, widow of John Shearing, who lived at this farm, which took the name of Shearing's Farm from them. My mother's own story of Mrs Shearing is as follows:

Damaris Hill married Mr John Shearing, and lived at the Street Farm over fifty years, the greater portion of which she was a widow. She was a remarkably clever, well-read woman of a fine, commanding presence, and managed the business herself. My father was her steward, but I have heard him say that his place was a sinecure for she knew more than he did, in fact was the only woman he knew capable of taking care of herself. She held great authority in the street and would quickly disperse a crowd of noisy men and boys if they congregated at the corner. She occasionally interfered in the quarrels of the gleaners. The women from the cottages in Mendham lane, where The Gables now stands, would glean with the Redenhall people, and also come to Mendham, and the Mendham folk seized their corn and scattered it in the street, whereupon Mrs Shearing came out of her house,

compelled them to pick it all up, and restore it, saying the women should glean at Mendham even if she had to drive to every farm to see justice done. She was an excellent reciter, scenes from Shakespeare, 'Suffolk Gleaning', 'John and Mary's Courtship', 'Richard and Kate' being some of her favourites. Then she always had a new book or magazine if you went to see her.

In the morning she wore a short skirt, leather buskins, a linsey jacket and a white hood while she fed her calves and poultry. By noon she was dressed for the day and drove out in a smart pony gig with white reins. She retired from farming about 1880 or 1881 and ended her days in Cambridge with her daughter, Mrs Elborne.

Thus did my mother describe the former occupant of the house I lived in for six years. Her desultory diary was not written until long after, when she became more lonely with less to do. I remember her often telling me of Mrs Shearing; and looking back to certain nights, when ghostly hands clutched and tugged my bedclothes, and when my dog, Joe, slept in my bedroom to keep the ghost away – and after reading this account – I wonder whether this might not have been Mrs Shearing's ghost! What a title for a story! It may well have been Mrs Shearing's ghost who was trying to get me out of her house!

Ten pounds a year was my rent for the two unfurnished rooms in Shearing's Farm. A horseman, Jonah Corbyn, his wife and daughter Jessie lived in the other end of the house. They were natives of the place, and Suffolk to the core. For six years I lived there, looked after and fed by Jonah's kind wife – for fifteen shillings a week all told – 'inclusive', as the advertisements say. She was neatness itself, with greying hair parted in the middle, a fresh complexion and placid smile. She talked little, and when she did she held her hands, one across the other, over the skirt of her very white apron – dear, kind soul. She was even glad to put up two queer student friends straight from Julian's *atelier* in Paris whom I had met on my first visit there, and did their washing, too! She was one in a thousand – ten thousand – and called me 'Master Alfred'. Her husband used to work on my grandmother's farm – Walsham Hall – then occupied by a Mr Wharton, who also farmed Shearing's, which was what is known as an off hand farm, Corbyn being foreman in charge.

Through the front door, my room – the parlour of old – was on the right. Its low ceiling, with an oak beam across the middle, gave it a snugness which could calm and pacify the tortured mind, however sorely distressed – as mine was when pictures were rejected, or the bank balance low, or a letter didn't come from my latest flame.

An old Turkey carpet and rugs from Boswell's (in exchange for a picture) made a groundwork of cosiness for my collection of antiques. This began with a large, round gate-legged table in the middle, and it increased by leaps and bounds until it was completed by an old walnut veneered bureau bought in Bungay, and polished and cleaned by a man in the next village called Robertson, an ex-cabinet maker, now retired, who kept chickens in his orchard or pottered about and did odd jobs.

This bureau was a gem when done up, and inside, on the oak bottom of the well, was the name of its maker, written in ink. I can remember it as I sit here, although I have not seen it for years, and it now lies stored in nailed-up rooms with all its other furniture friends in my house at Dedham, occupied by troops. The writing ran thus 'Wm Palleday – at ye Crown Inn – Aldermanbury – London. Cabinet Maker.' Like all craftsmen of his day, Wm Palleday had made a lasting job of that bureau.

Another piece to play an important part in the room was a tall, japanned and ormolued grandfather clock, which only just cleared the ceiling. A lacquered golden cockerel was on its door, and a circular glass-covered hole showing the pendulum as it swung. This clock kept time to a second, and was wound up each Saturday night by Mrs Corbyn. I found and bought it at an inn, together with a pair of Kneller period portraits in oval frames and some embroidered silks of girls holding birdcages, when I went to Woolpit Fair in Suffolk. I sold the portraits and silks for double the amount paid for the lot, getting the tall clock for nothing. I can see the innkeeper now with his old sisters. He was known as 'the Boy Alfred', and was too given to drinking.

A glass-fronted bookcase and bureau, yet another clock, and some chairs, bought from a shop in Lavenham when on a visit to the famous horse-fair. There were candlesticks, knife-boxes and oddments which I used to buy from old Ted Ellis – a dealer's buyer who attended sales, and who had a curiosity shop at the bottom of Grapes Hill in Norwich. He was a curiosity himself.

Ellis bought stuff for the Boswells. Many an evening developed into a carousal in the back room of the shop as he pulled out dusty bottles from parcels of old port bought at some country-house sale. And when the fire died low, someone broke up a crippled chair to make a blaze, while Ellis told tales of the days when he helped with the elephants in Sanger's Circus and of sales of furniture and pictures and knock-outs, until past midnight. Once, in extravagant mood, I went as far as buying a pair of Sheffield-plated candelabra from him, which finally gave a tone to my parlour.

I still possess those early belongings, and if I give them more space here than they deserve it is because, as first purchases, each gave me a new thrill when it arrived, and led me to alter the arrangement of the room. The rarest pieces – if I bought any now – could never give the same satisfaction or pride as when I stood back by the fireplace – treading on poor Friday – to take a look at the whole after some fresh addition. Mrs Corbyn took great interest in the placing of the pieces and polished them, too. God bless her memory.

That room saw punch parties. The eighteenth-century recipe for this punch came from the landlord, father of the sisters at the Swan – a pint of rum, a pint of brandy, a pint of sherry. Lots of loaf-sugar, each lump being rubbed on the outside of a lemon until well saturated. (Note the delicate aroma of this process.) Two or more lemons – according to taste – to be cut in half and squeezed over the sugar in the bowl. A handful of cloves simmering gently on the stove, while the rum, brandy and sherry all together are warming there,

too, in a saucepan. Then a pint or more – according to taste – of boiling water is poured over the sugar in the bowl, the clove-water being added as well (here again, note the aroma). After stirring with the ladle, pour the warm spirits on and stir again. Then what a glorious, scented, steaming bowl of nectar for artists or anyone to sip! Its very smell alone made us merry and bright, starting away with 'Landlord, fill the flowing bowl'. This recipe has been tried out in St John's Wood, Chelsea, Cornwall, Paris – in Scotland, home of whisky, even – and never known to fail in making a night.

What hunting noises followed if horsemen made the party! What talking of hard riding! What tales of six-mile, ten-mile hunts on bold horses which could gallop and stay! One glass is enough now – 1944 – no more. One glass indeed! The war has sent up the prices of these once-cheap ingredients to fabulous sums, and lemons have passed out of sight and mind. Anyhow, punch made to recipe, quieted down even with more boiling water, has an intangible, delicate, insinuating flavour that defies description. It not only makes you smile, it awakens the fancy and dispels the gloom. Would our brain-cells have been better in the long run without those doses? The answer at once is: I can smell its spicy, odorous steam yet, see its pale amber colour in the clinking glasses – and could go through 'Locksley Hall', which I learned at sixteen. But of course the further question arises: without that recipe might I not have been able to go through the whole of Tennyson?

XI

VILLAGE MODELS

RAW sienna, French blue, cadmium yellow, vermilion, yellow ochre – those are the ingredients to write about, rather than rum, brandy and sherry, not forgetting the flake white.

What a day this is for the studi! A howling tempest of wind and driving rain has raged incessantly for three days and nights. The magnificent fuchsia in full bloom and yellow dahlias outside the window are tossed and torn in the wild blasts of Exmoor. Shocks of sodden oats are braving the storm on sodden fields. Yet here am I trying to paint in words in a summer-house, instead of painting in a studio. Will these recollections ever interest a soul or be an example, good or bad, to youthful artists? But I don't feel like painting, and so, for a few hours, let me use memory in another way – expressing myself in a different medium before the tablets of memory fade. My intention when beginning these recollections was to forestall anyone who might tell strange things about me when I am departed. Here is a story told to my wife a short time ago.

During the early months of my Presidency I was giving a private dinner in the beautiful Assembly Room. There was a fine show of the Academy's silver on the table: silver candlesticks, silver dessert-plates, salt-cellars, sugar sifters, a silver ship and every kind of lovely thing that was made in silver in the days of the Georges. My wife called at six o'clock with bunches of tulips to give the table colour, and, full of curiosity to see the Academy's display of silver, had gone up to the room where the caterer's butler was putting finishing touches to the table. Not knowing who my wife was, he told her that he had known Sir Alfred many years – the President was what he called 'a goer'. He also told her how, long ago, at a Royal Academy Club dinner, he was handing a dish of mutton cutlets to the man on Sir Alfred's right, and Sir Alfred, who was expressing himself about something or other, gave a flourish with his arm, and upset the chops over the table. The gentleman being served at the time had, like the rest, gone home very late, and the next morning his wife found a mutton chop in the pocket of his dinner-jacket!

But to my story. 'Quick, thy tablets memory.' The setting and mixing of

colours on a palette is more serious than mixing brandy, rum and sherry; but, without a pause, may become wearisome. The thought of a palette brings back days when I was for ever changing my size and style of palettes. In the Mendham studio, with the teasels in the jar on the table, the discarded palettes were hung on the walls until they took up room needed for paintings. Oblong ones were changed for oval, smaller for larger. Nobody could paint unless they used a large one, thought I. I tried a huge curved affair weighted with lead on the corner. Finally I came back to where I had started, using the sort that fitted my box. Often the studio, with smells of paint and turps, became impossible, and I was driven to work outdoors, with 'the sky above my head and the grass beneath my feet'.

This morning I awoke thinking of a big lad, Walter Butcher, sitting for me on a black pony with halters slung round its neck, as I had seen at horse fairs. I was putting him into a large water-colour – 'An East Anglian Horse Fair' – from which I painted a vast canvas. The water-colour was hung in the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours, and afterwards sold for twenty-five pounds to the owner of the pleasure wherry *Triumph*, on which we sailed the Norfolk Broads. This seemed an enormous sum for a water-colour, and when I happened to pay a visit to my old friends in the lithographic artists' room in Norwich, and was asked how I was getting on, I boasted of this sale; to which one replied: 'Well, by Jove, that's all right! It takes only four of them to make a hundred quid!' This staggered us all.

My thoughts about the lad Walter Butcher, on the black pony with the halters slung round its neck, remind me that I used many models in those years; and that a pen picture of villagers who used to sit would not be out of place at this stage of my story.

Artists in the country have drawn their models from the young, aged or loafing fraternity not engaged in regular work. It was the same with me. A parcel of boys was always about the yards at home, and one of these – Willy Saxby, son of our groom – was my first model, and stood for me fishing by the mill-pool when I was but a few years his senior.

I made use of the others, too. One liked standing, another didn't. There was Teddy Holmes, a swarthy boy with a good colour, and well fed; Jimmy Betts, with a pale, round face, sad blue eyes, and running nose, who looked as though he needed nourishment; and Freddy Pivott, a bright lad, with patched trousers, much too big for him. These were sons of carters working on the place. I recall, as I write, a forgotten work – my first attempt at a large canvas – sold to Mr Page, head of Page Bros, for £5. It was done in my summer holiday from Norwich. The scene: two farm-boys and horses at a gate, with the buildings and yard of Walsham Hall in the background. The first boy, Freddy Pivott, sitting on a bay horse, holding a white one, came well. He was wearing a very wide old sun-hat, like a panama – I loved painting a face in shadow. All one long afternoon I worked painting the other boy, Saxby, undoing the gate. The picture was looking well. I was sure of a prize at the

School of Art. When I showed it to one of the farm-hands, and then to other people, one and all said that the boy, supposed to be undoing the gate, looked as though he was doing something against the post. It was a blow! – a difficult passage to correct.

A bigger boy – Fred Baldry – used to fish from the boat, and liked being painted.

One wet day, old Bob Baldry, his father – a whitened, dusty mill-hand – sat mending sacks with Ephraim Butcher near a window in the mill. I saw them, and soon was back there with my water-colours, painting them as they bent over the dusty sacks, doing an indoor job on a wet day.

All artists can look back on the working of a particular picture which had given them extra pleasure. This was one of mine. Old Ephraim Butcher – fat, short, bearded and sorrowful, pig-feeder and pig-killer, for ever carrying two pails of pig-food on a yoke over his bowed shoulders, needed persuasion before agreeing to pose just anywhere at any time. He breathed heavily; and no wonder – he was the sole adviser to my father in all pig matters, and sang bass in the church choir. When a new High Church parson came and put the choir into purple cassocks and white surplices, everybody went to church; and as the processional hymn sounded up the nave, all eyes in the congregation were fixed on Butcher, round as a barrel, serious and heavy, bringing up the rear, making deep bass rumblings which meant nothing, for he could neither read nor write.

Then there was Dan Betts, one of our carters, who wore small silver earrings, and shaved off his moustache for me to put him in a picture, and became so transfigured that his wife and children didn't know him. A kind man and father. I used the family. Tilly, his little daughter, stands peeling an orange, with Jimmy, who is eating one, in a picture I called 'A Gala Day', which now hangs in the Art Gallery in Preston.

Pod Aldous and Ned Aldous, types bred in every village since the Stone Age, and another of the same cut – Porky Emmerson – were always ready, if about, to do anything in the standing or sitting line for a pint, or, better still, a quart. Pod Aldous was swarthy and secretive-looking, with beady, glowering black eyes, always on the move, and while those eyes turned to left or right, his head never budged between hunched-up shoulders – hunched because of his hands being always in trouser pockets, worn in front. He shaved his upper lip and chin, and grew short black whiskers all round his yellow face. A black clay pipe was always in his mouth and an old black bowler right down over the back of his head. He affected a higgler's style of dress – black, faded and soiled.

His brother Ned was heavier, looser, less cunning and without Pod's shifty eye, but of the same kidney, stealthy, sly, both of them closed up like oysters. I believe their line in life was what is known as higgling – fowl-dealing. Porky Emmerson was a mystery, who came and went and did harvests and helped to kill and dress pigs – hence his name.

But the real professional at pig-killing was old Sam Rayner, who lived somewhere outside the village. In spite of all his engagements and journeys, I seized on him once or twice. He had a frizzy white beard and a bright eye with an optimistic stare, and carried not only his large basket but gossip as well from place to place, walking fast, with a stick, and his pipe in mouth, covering many miles in a day.

Then there was Richmer Emmerson of the Glebe, who wore his old black soft felt hat with brim looped up like Dick Turpin's. Harry Seaman, who later looked after horses and ponies that I collected, was a decent fellow. He helped me a lot. And there was Hoppy Daniels, lame in a leg, who had the reddest face in Suffolk, and wore a big watch-chain when I put him into my 'gala day' picture in his best hat and coat.

I must not forget Ephraim's daughter, Honor, for she stood for me on one occasion day after day through a heat wave, hay-making. When she felt rocky she sat in the shade of a tall, ancient nut-fence. One day I'll visit these places again. That nut-fence ran along the top of a small field belonging to a Mr Cook, who had a grey mare I often painted. Ben Cook – that was his name.

Polly Scotchmer from the Red Lion was another model. She is on Hoppy's arm in the Preston picture. Then there were the three all-important, principal actors in the scene – the Grays, van-dwellers and travellers, who wintered in a meadow by the Red Lion, and disappeared each summer to Woolpit in Suffolk with their swinging-boats, coconuts and shooting-gallery, and used to come back later when I could afford to make it worth their while.

Old Gray – Nobby as he was called – was really a Suffolker, and Charlotte, a neat, strapping, tall figure of a woman, was a gipsy. Fred, known as 'Young Fred', was like his mother. The old man – Nobby – was a natty, wise-looking old bird. Bald-pated and clean-shaven, he was never without his clay pipe; and when reading the news or mending umbrellas he wore a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles which gave him the appearance of a crafty old lawyer. Charlotte's black hair was parted and brushed flat back, and fastened in a little bun on the nape of her fat neck. She was a mighty woman, twice as heavy as the old man, brown as a berry, and stood with great arms folded across her bosom. When she ran on too much, old Gray would say in a scathing tone, 'Be quiet, woman' – and she was. Fred was a good son, and worked at his coconuts while the mother shouted by the shooting-gallery and Gray attended the swings.

What a trio for an artist! And there they were for the asking. They loved posing, and still better they loved seeing a sovereign or a pint of beer. I dare not begin to think about what I should have done without the Grays – Nobby, Charlotte and Fred. Nobby was a philosopher. Life was full of interest for him, and he knew a lot about Suffolk – High Suffolk, as he called it. Walsham-le-Willows was his paradise. The flower show there was the best in the district.

XII

ANATOMY OF THE HORSE

IN between the spaces of life are a few landmarks which still show on the faint horizon of the past when one lies awake in the early hours, going far back in memory. These increase and surprise us as they arise and take shape.

Stubbs' *Anatomy of the Horse* makes a large landmark in my youthful days, with its copper-plate engravings, which at the time I was unable to appreciate to the full. Now, being older and knowing all there is to know of this great artist, through reading and looking at his work, I begin to realize what an indefatigable colossus Stubbs was. To study those plates – having read of how and why, after making his drawings, he also had to engrave them on copper himself because nobody else would do it – gives the serious artist food for much thought. Mr Scott at the School of Art had told me, when talking of comparative and animal anatomy, that I should try to find a Stubbs' *Anatomy*; and one day I called in on Reuben Levine, who sold old silver and rare books, and he made a note of this, and advertised and got one – an original edition, in full size and good condition, for which I paid fifty shillings.

I had been drawing Rosa Bonheur's cast of the anatomical horse, and had studied other books. Then, with these plates, I began to understand the shape and make of the horse, and while I was full of enthusiasm and acquiring fresh knowledge came another event, all to the good. This was the gift to the Museum of the most perfectly set up skeletons of a man and horse, which were given by an old vet who was retiring from practice.

The man, whose bones had been so well preserved, had been a murderer, and was hanged at the castle. He must have been a tall fellow. The teeth were white, not one was missing. The skeletons had been standing for forty years in an old stable loft in the premises of Mr Morniment, the veterinary – a gruesome sight to encounter in the shadows or with the white light of the moon streaming through the skylight. I had often seen them there, and stood conjecturing on Nature's extravagant wonders.

I knew this group so well that when expounding to some ignoramus of the horse-world on the comparison of the horse's anatomy to our own, I always carried the impression of it in my mind, as I still do today. The horse's hocks

were the man's ankles, each with six bones; its knees were our own wrists; the horse walked on its fingers and toes; the stifle-joint was the human knee, and all the rest. Some listener might have been impressed, but few of them listened or cared, and my words fell on stony ground. For all that, I am sure that comparative anatomy can help both the artist and the horse-master.

Another chance of seeing sights of blood came my way. The cavalry regiments which were quartered in Norwich kept a pack of hounds which hunted the carted deer, and their kennels were near the barracks on Mousehold Heath. I was introduced, through a woman who painted horses, to a Captain Marriott, the veterinary officer of a dragoon regiment then in the city, and he arranged for me to see a dead horse skinned at the kennels on a certain afternoon. I shall never like seeing the skin taken off an animal. Seeing it as a student, my wonderment should have overcome my horror. It failed then, as it does now.

Not long ago I was painting at the Pytchley kennels. As I sat at work, with a boy holding a hound on a leash, I could hear a faint rattle coming from a shed adjoining the slaughter-house at the top of the meadow, caused by rats feeding in the mountainous piles of bones stored there. Then I saw, coming through a gate, a groom riding one horse and leading another, both good-looking horses. Being too engrossed with my study of hounds, I took no notice of this entry. A few minutes later there came the report of a gun.

'That's done for him,' said the boy holding the hound.

The groom appeared again on his horse, without its lately led stable-companion, and went through the gate as he had come. Out of curiosity, I walked up to the slaughter-house, and found that the kennel-man had already begun to flay the horse, a large thoroughbred chestnut that had belonged to Mr George Drummond. At the sight of that flayed head and eye I fled, and got to work again.

Belonging to such a man, this horse would have been a good performer, and he looked the sort as I saw him led across to be destroyed; and here he was, in a great pool of blood which was draining away, his glossy skin being torn from him, soon to feed the hounds he had followed from many a cover. Such is life.

Those studies-in-the-making were for a picture of Barker, the Pytchley huntsman. Captain Macdonald Buchanan then was Master, and the picture was for him. Some years before that I had painted Freeman on a black horse called Pilot for Mr Ronald Tree, Master at that time.

When I find the energy to turn over the heaps of old sketch- and note-books which have accumulated during my life, I realize that I did a lot of work; and as I find earlier, soiled, old books I come upon drawings of that Norwich skeleton, of its parts, either from one side or the other: drawings from Stubbs; from the Rosa Bonheur horse; and in much later ones, very carefully done, fore and hind parts from the skeletons of St Simon and Stockwell in South Kensington Museum. I was doing this with fresh interest not long before the war, and now as I write, with the war still on, I wonder where such historic treasures of the equine world are housed. Where is the skeleton of Eclipse

which belongs to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons? No doubt it is in a safe place. Think of that famous horse's skeleton, once covered and articulated with tendon, muscle and nerve, all under the rich, dark-chestnut coat, groomed and polished day after day throughout his short span. These used to be my thoughts as I looked at the structure standing in its glass case. Yes; indeed those bones had travelled about the country in the 1760's, all once part of a live and famous steed as we see him portrayed in the picture by Stubbs, with Wildman, his owner, and his two sons, in blue coats, cocked hats, white stockings and buckled shoes. That skull had once contained the brain and racing instincts of Eclipse! His eye had moved in and looked out from the dark socket. His lips had covered and been drawn over those teeth, had played with the bit and sneered when smelling something queer, and had played afterwards with many a mare at stud! And what crowds were once attracted by the horse! what betting! what noise of coarse shouting! – and now, here were his white bones in a glass case!

I wanted more paper. I keep reams of it in an old Jacobean oak chest next the fireplace behind me. Before I can open the lid of the chest I have to remove what stands on it. An old copper urn, a large oriental bowl full of rose-leaves, and a white horse's skull. This skull has stood there for years. Friends say, 'How hideous!' I explain to them the beauty of it, although there is a ghostliness about the dark, hollow eye-sockets, the teeth. Being in too much haste to write, the skull is still in the grandfather chair near the chest, where I should have replaced it after closing the lid.

There it sits, showing the frontal bones, the subtle modelling of the bridge of the nose, the dark cavities where the eyes once shone, and lower, where the bony formation ends, and where the velvety expanding surfaces above the nostrils used to quiver. The bone of the lower jaw and its rows of grinders meets the top row, and in the lamplight the whole skull seems alive.

It came from the Pytchley kennels – the skull of a thoroughbred. What a train of imaginary thought is already laid! What a story could be woven about that skull, which seems so alert and listening! And yet a lifeless object to examine, with a magic grain in the bone more delicate than the grain in precious wood. Ivory traceries and shapes. A miracle of creation – of God; a mere trifle in a world of mysteries, of millions upon millions of God's master-pieces.

I lift it from the chair and place it again on the lid of the old oak chest. The grain of the wood is God's design, the grain of the bone is God's design. I know less than nothing. As I placed it, looking down on the perfect symmetry of the forehead – the curves and the occipital bones – I was astounded.

What are mere paintings – politics – anything? Nature is lasting – supreme.

XIII

MY FIRST HORSE

SINCE horses have been with me in dreams and when awake, let me tell of a nightmarish experience that momentarily shook my existence and humbled my pride at the age of twenty-two.

A determination one day to possess a horse of my own – in spite of inward prophetic apprehensions saying ‘no’ – urged me to bring this about. Were I walking or cycling, or riding somebody else’s horse, and met this person or that on the road, I hoped one day I should look on them from the back of a beautiful grey horse of my own. What triumph if it were old Miss That or Mrs So-and-so in brougham or victoria, being driven by a liveried coachman! Now and then I even met and passed a carriage and pair from a hall in a park, and imagined myself from the back of my own lovely grey, complacently looking down on them, and they wondering who this young man might be.

I was still living in the house of my parents, because I have never forgotten the bedroom and bed where those dreams of that horse were dreamt. Saying nothing of my ambitious designs, I at last saw a sale of hunters at Ipswich advertised in the *East Anglian*, the earliest newspaper I can remember. My father, whose stable I intended using, cared little whether I bought a horse or not. Like many parents, he had learned to give way to selfish sons.

On the day of the sale, in breeches and leggings, I entrained for Ipswich. I got a catalogue and hung about for the ‘lot’ I hoped to buy – one of three from a Mr Long who lived near Saxmundham, sold as ‘a good hunter, eight years old’. A large, fine-looking bay horse it was, with cock tail and his mane on, full sixteen hands. Affecting nonchalance, I had the horse trotted out. As the other horses went up and were sold, at what I then thought were good prices – such as thirty and forty guineas to fifty or sixty pounds – I waited impatiently for this beautiful bay. His turn came, and the bidding reached twenty-five pounds. Should I bid or should I not – and return home ignominiously, without a horse and glory? Suddenly I awoke and threw all the future to the winds, and was bidding twenty-eight guineas of my small, hard-won account at Barclays Bank, Harleston, where Mr Stebbings, who sang ‘True, true till death’, stood behind the counter, wearing his gold eyeglasses. Good Lord! what would he say?

But, in spite of fright and fears, I went on bidding, and got the horse for thirty-six guineas. Paralysed, I tried to give my name to the auctioneer, and finally went round behind and gave it. I took out the cheque-book (the second or third in my life) and paid. Then, as I went down to the boxes and gave instructions about putting the horse on the train, a tall, smiling swell of forty-five or thereabouts came up to me.

'It's you who bought the horse?'

'Yes,' said I, utterly ignorant of what classified a horse as 'a good hunter'.

'Now', said he, 'when he comes to a turn he may want to dispute the way with you. He doesn't mean anything; just give him a good dig in the ribs with your heels and he'll go on.'

I smiled a superior smile with dread in my heart. Here was a beginning!

A telegram was sent to meet the train at Harleston with a saddle and bridle in the cart. I travelled on the train. I believe my brother met me, and soon the horse was out, to the surprise and admiration of the porters and lookers-on. Then we saddled him and, getting on top of his sixteen hands, I rode from the station and through the town in pride and vain exultation. A more thrilling ride I never had known than this on my first horse. His name was Tophthorne – and I was the victim.

Arriving home, in the stable yard, Saxby, the groom, stood all eyes and ears.

'Well, bless me! What on earth possessed you to buy a great 'oss like that? What you want is a nice little sort about fifteen hands at the most.'

He was a saddened and disheartened man, all because I wanted to look down on people in broughams and victorias.

The next day the family turned out to see the horse do a gallop round the North meadow. It ended in dishonour and defeat. After nearly getting into a cesspool from the cattle-sheds and doing everything a nappy horse does when he knows he has a fool on his back, I at last got him to a ford across the river leading to vast plains of grassland. My father, who had been telling me that the horse would kill me, followed with a long whip. In the middle of the ford the horse acted his part to perfection. How I kept on him or got him to the other side I shall never know.

What a ride I had after that! The third time round this great field (it seemed enormous then – about twenty acres or so) the horse said 'No', and his tactics were those which nappy horses have employed ever since they were ridden. No wonder he had been passed on – and what a curse to pass on to me, of all folk!

The best part of my savings stood there in the box, Saxby, gloomy and downcast, staring at him with me, my father assuring me that he would kill me. What a horse and what a back and loins! But his eye had beaten me. I knew nothing of 'scrumpy' eyes then. I continued to ride while Saxby cut down the corn. Being a miller's son, there was all the bran I needed. The horse had days, and as I got used to him and learned to know him, he gave less trouble, until one day he refused to pass a donkey and cart, walked through a

low fence into the vicarage garden, trod all over the vicar's asparagus beds, and reared and turned and played hell in the strawberries.

I stuck to my purchase long enough to enjoy one great triumph. On a certain day I was to call for my dear doctor friend, George Candler, at his house in Harleston. He was a real hunting doctor, and rode a large old thoroughbred called Rocket, bought at Tattersalls. Candler and his partner Robinson gloried in a day with the Dunston or Lord Stradbroke's harriers. The doctor was to take me with him to Sydney Carmen of Pulham Hall. Carmen was a clean-shaven, rosy-looking, horsey, hunting bachelor farmer. There, with a large black-bearded and famous farmer, named Joe Dimmock, of Shotford Hall, we were to have a school over Pulham Hall farm.

Arriving in front of the surgery with its polished brass plate, and peering in at the windows of the doctor's house, I spied Candler's face. Down the steps he came, looking green with envy.

'My word,' said he, 'what a horse! He's worth sixty guineas, Alfred! -- anything from fifteen to twenty-five being the doctor's figure!'

There I sat watching the reflection of myself in the Georgian drawing-room window. Already I had seen ourselves in every shop window, and wished the horse were as good as he looked; for he satisfied my vain ambitions so far as appearances went.

We were soon at Pulham, where the other two horsey men wondered how I could ever have possessed such a horse or indulged in such extravagance. However, they saw daylight both between the horse and myself (and in my deal also) when he refused the first ditch and fence and gave a magnificent and healthy display on his bran-feeding. This was my fault, though, being no horseman. The climax came, for after nearly fulfilling my father's prophecy that he would kill me, Tophthorne rose to the occasion. After all sorts of trapeze contortions, I got him over this place, and that with the others calling out to me to 'lay back', until we came to a large hurdled sheepfold. Soon all the other three were put to shame. Not one of their steeds would have it. They rode, kicked and jammed away to no good. Then they said, 'You see if you can give us a lead', and in blissful ignorance, streaming with sweat, I trotted up to the hurdles. My sinner leaped over them with ease, went on and leaped out over the other side, and there I sat triumphant.

'He's a good horse,' they all said, for nothing would get their own over.

This short-lived comfort gave place to agony of mind, and nightmares happened in succession as I awoke, in a cold sweat, gasping and calling 'Whoa'. The horse had his days. He made anything he met an excuse to tyrannize over his abject rider.

The end came thus. There were sales of horses at Grimwade's of Colchester, and I entered the horse in one of these. On the journey he cut his legs and got down in the box, and was sold at the sale for fifteen guineas.

How lightheartedly I came home, and how my stomach turned at the thought of that horse, and how deeply I hated him, I cannot express in words.

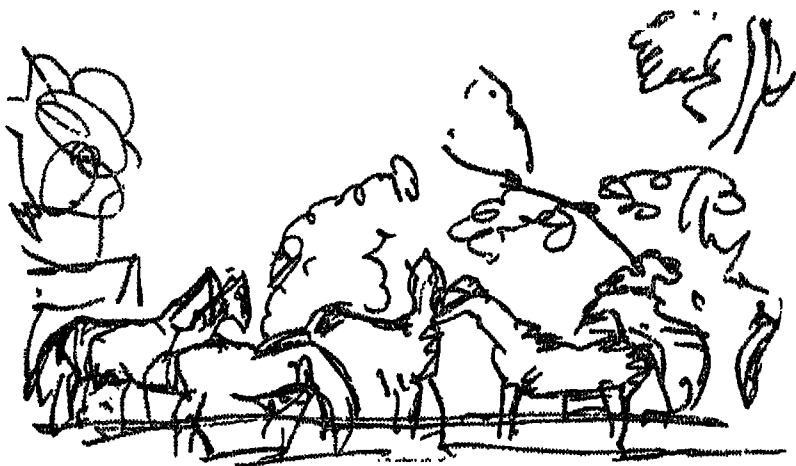
I regained my peace of soul, and resigned my foolhardiness for a more humble and temperate way of life.

It was some time before I again thought of having a horse to ride. I was content to exist on youth, spirits and health, whilst Saxby and my father had the satisfaction of knowing I was not killed. My desperation and despair gave way to exultant freedom. A horse was a nuisance. Give me a walk with Friday, hunting the hedgerows. No more horses!

Some purchaser bought a sound animal for a small sum. Work being the only cure for such a sort, I had imposed long distances on him, which had no effect whatever either on his limbs or constitution. His only unsoundness was in his head.

In the days of my vanity I had wished to be seen on the back of a fine horse. So often were he and I at variance that my first act, after being floored, was to look round to make sure no living soul had seen me!

When writing of my first horse this morning, imagination carried me away. So vividly was I living in the past, that when I mounted one of my friendly steeds for an afternoon ride, I thought that I was again on the back of that revolutionary monster of forty odd years ago. Not until I rode out of the stable yard was I able to cast off the nightmare. A lively imagination let loose becomes a curse!



XIV

LAVENHAM HORSE FAIR

I REMEMBER the water-colour, 'A Suffolk Horse Fair', which I sold for twenty-five pounds, and how I boasted of its sale on one of my visits to the artists in the room at Page Bros. ('Four of those, Alfred, make a hundred quid,' said one of them.)

This water-colour was the design for my first big canvas, eighty by fifty inches. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. Painting so large a picture from a water-colour was asking for trouble. I worked away at it all through the winter. The tone of the grass gave me the same trouble as it does today. I was wretched. But my worst hindrance was the roan colt coming out of the picture. That ambitious effort should have taught me my limitations. I found it skied in the last room of the Academy. Now it is hanging in the Norwich Art Gallery, presented by a kind donor who bought it from someone who bought it from me for a song.

Lavenham Horse Fair. What a sight! This famous fair of heavy draught-horses eclipsed anything of its kind I had ever seen. The Swan was then unaltered, and not the swell place it is today. I got a room there in spite of its being packed with a breed of men long since gone: men with fat jowls, wearing wide-brimmed bowlers or half-high hats, who came from London to buy heavy horses for London work – for railway companies' vans, brewers' drays and a host of other trades.

Gray and his son came from Walsham-le-Willows, an old haunt of theirs. It was through them that I went to see this wonderful sight. The day started well with rashers of Suffolk-cured bacon – a pleasant detail to remember. The Grays called for me soon after, and I saw the scenes which started me off painting horse fairs.

We went from inn-yard to inn-yard, where straw lay strewn on the ground, and those well-fed, clean-shaven, purple-faced men already were seeing horses trotted up and down in the yards, in the main street, in the lesser streets, on a green and up near the great church with its tall tower.

I see the powerful quarters of those great cart-horses standing in rows in market-place and yard, their manes and tails plaited with straw and braided

with blue, yellow and scarlet ribbons. Their action when trotted out was as vigorous as that of the hackney. Their necks were 'clothed in thunder', their hooves sounded in the street while a man running behind bustled them with the end of a long, brass-bound whip.

Long ago I saw similar doings in France, where a whole town would be filled with dapple grey Percherons, those on show dashing past in hand at full trot. Magnificent! a sight for the gods! Gone are such scenes; gone are the horses.

Last week every class of man and woman swarmed in the Ascot enclosures and saw the Royal procession of only three or four carriages, drawn mostly by Dutch horses, pass up the course each day. And they saw seven French horses out of eight gallop the two and a half miles for the Gold Cup, won by Arbar. While they watched and betted on the efforts of those last specimens of the disappearing, familiar beasts called horses, hundreds were either being killed in abattoirs, or suffering on long railway journeys, or pitched about on the sea in the holds of cattle-boats. Many of those killed here are eaten by ourselves, many by cats, dogs and 'the greyhounds'.

A shortage of petrol would show us that there are now, in 1948, not enough horses left in Britain to cultivate Norfolk and Suffolk.

Let us for a moment think of the millions of tons of tall, healthy-grown straw – bright, fibrous, lasting fifty years in thatch – that have for centuries been put back on the land from yards where cart-horses, cattle and pigs have saturated and stamped it down, year in, year out, to be carted and spread on the land. Today we even burn straw, and are farming on all those centuries' accumulation of horse, cattle and sheep manure that has made and kept the soil in heart. Its virtues, its effects, will remain yet awhile, but may gradually die unless replenished as before.

In 1902 came 'The Vagabonds', another ambitious canvas, eighty by fifty inches! This picture, enlarged from a water-colour, was carried through with *gouache* studies done on grey paper on the spot – that spot being a by-road leading to Middleton Hall, exactly where, as children, we had seen the gipsy encampment. The distance we ran in scared flight back to the governess from that dreaded glimpse of the gipsies was later to be the distance taken up in the lane by the horses and ponies coming along it which was my picture. As I stood there painting, I recalled the dark man with clay pipe making baskets, in company with his wife and children. I smelt the wood-smoke from his fire as plainly as I smelt the rotting poplar leaves in the grass around me when I was making my studies twenty years later.

It was a full mile from the studio, my scene in the lane – just past the finger-post where forks went left and right. 'The Vagabonds' was meant to be a dreary, desolate picture. It never was. Here is the scene.

A grass-bordered lane curving away between fences and tall poplar-trees; long puddles in the cart-tracks reflecting the sky. Coming along the lane is a straggling group of horses and gipsies, one figure seated in a cart silhouetted

against the sky in the centre, another riding, bringing up the rear. What a forlorn picture they made! Mine would never look like that if I stood there for years. Only as a failure is it worthy of description. But my heart goes out to it as I recall the hours of work in the lane.

Sydney Denny, a farmer (long since dead), came for the cows each afternoon about four, and got so used to our doings in the lane that he took no notice of us as we stood there either with one, two, three or more horses, or with the cart and my mother's pony harnessed in it. This was a mere beginning. The effort came when, alone in the studio with my outdoor studies, I faced the canvas day after day until the last dead leaf in the foreground was painted. I spared no pains. I had seen 'Colt-hunting in the New Forest' by Lucy Kemp-Welch, an enormous canvas, at the Academy that year. The picture appeared in every illustrated paper. It was all the talk. My aunts talked of it. My uncle, who read Rider Haggard, Marie Corelli, and went to London to see Irving and the Doré Gallery, had seen it. I was out to beat it, whatever the cost.

'The Vagabonds' came home after a journey to Liverpool and other Art Galleries. It strayed around like this for some time until I sold it for thirty pounds when hard up. In the summer of 1947, when in Norfolk, I saw it covering half a wall in the dining-room of an old and loyal friend. Exhibited in 1902, my studies for it were made in the lane during November 1901. Thinking about this as I looked at the picture, the present faded out, and for a brief spell I was again at the spot where I had stood forty-six years ago. Then I recalled how, working late one evening, the sky cleared to a bright afterglow. There was frost in the air, and the puddles reflected the light. The landscape darkened; horses and figures grew darker still; poplars along the roadside were black against the sunset. Here was the inspiration for another picture which was bought in an Ipswich Exhibition for the Art Gallery there. Never was I more in need of money.



XV

SEEING AN ARTIST AT WORK

VERSES learned in youth will remain in my journey till I die. Often as I work, one runs in my head, faint or strong, as the painting goes. As late as 1912, reading Masfield's 'Everlasting Mercy', I remembered many of the passages which I make use of at times.

For instance, lying like a sluggard in bed, wasting moments, deciding what my day shall be, I spring up with the line on my lips: 'That's what I'll do, I cried aloud'. Often when I stand looking at a picture where something drastic has to happen, I seize my brushes and palette with those words on my lips, and as like as not I either spoil the picture or pull it round. It is a useful, heartening line, so is the following one in that poem.

My wife was once away on Exmoor, and I inveigled a brother artist to stay and waste time with me. His name was Codner. He was lean and long, unknown and beardless then. We rode all day or wandered along the river-bank and bathed. One day, near Stoke-by-Nayland, we were riding along a lane. There in a meadow sat an artist at work, his white umbrella fixed, a quiet figure in a peaceful scene. My friend suddenly became a picture of misery – frustration.

'Alfred,' he said, 'to hell with all this bloody riding and fooling about. I'm going to start work. You and I will begin painting tomorrow.'

The sight of that artist quietly at work, intent on his object, had smitten our consciences.

Did our work bring all joy? When painting out of doors, the mere squeezing of colours on the palette, taking up the brushes, finding the centre of the scene, irritates and retards the impatient soul. The impulse is held back.

Long ago I took my paint-box, easel and canvas with me to that lithographic artists' room in Norwich on a Thursday before the Easter holidays, and the same evening caught a train, carrying all my belongings, and was met at Harleston station by Saxby with the horse and trap. On a clear, bright Good Friday morning, taking food and drink and all my gear in the old boat, I rowed down that bright blue river with pale, dead reeds and sedges on either side. Pollard willows and saplings shone, full of sap, almost crimson at their tops.

What joy! Here was I, ready for the fray. Where should I pull up and begin? My spot was soon found. Marsh marigolds were dotted on the green marsh, and warblers sang. I tied and fixed the boat, set the easel and canvas. Like any other artist about to begin, I was filled with a breathless ecstasy. I opened my box, and behold, it was filled with stones!

In an age of practical jokes, could a joke be more cruel and unscrupulous than this? My utter despair, my misery were unbearable. The blow hit me hard. What could I do? I was utterly beaten. The bitter momentary disappointment is indescribable even today. Those fellow artists in the artists' room had played a dirty trick!

Once on Exmoor, not long ago, I arrived by car at Cloud Farm to paint Bagsworthy Water, some twelve miles away, and found I had forgotten my brushes. I have developed the habit of carrying my brushes separately in a brown-paper roll. A box holds a miserable handful, and I like at least one big brush among the twenty or thirty I choose to take. With no brushes, I viciously chewed the ends of pieces of wood, tied paint-rags on sticks, sought out minute fir-cones washed down in spate to the stream's bank, some of these matted with fine strands of grass. A tangle was a grand thing on such an occasion. Cursing and raging – not to be beaten, I found that with these tools I could do a lot, and the final result was much the same as if I had used brushes. I returned next day. Conditions were the same. I sat in the same place near the roaring foam. I made the same design and painted another picture; this time with brushes. Afterwards, placing the two canvases side by side, and standing back to look, they appeared exactly the same, four yards away.

But to my story. To add to these memories of disappointments, joys and miseries, only one of my pictures was hung at the Academy in 1904 – the Cockburn port year. It was called 'Whitsuntide'. I have told in an earlier chapter how I painted a grey mare and foal in a field of buttercups when all went well, when Norman held the mare and looked after me. Whitsuntide weather. Sunlight, peace; no forgotten brushes. I never dreamed when I stood in that yellow field, painting, watching the little foal playing and scampering round its mother, that the picture was to save me from a narrow shave. Since I began sending my pictures in 1898 I never had them all out, and this was the single occasion when I had only a solitary picture on the walls. It was a nasty jar, which I remember when looking at a field of buttercups.

XVI

SCULPTURE AT THE LUXEMBOURG

I NEVER tire of my garden. This morning is bright. Light flashes in the laurels. The sound of the rustling leaves of an old plane-tree mingle with the sighs of its neighbour, a tall wellingtonia. Each day, with the wind north-west, there is a repetition of the same sounds. The predominant note comes from the top branches of the large oak near the gate. Hidden in its leafy greenery the insistent chiff-chaff goes on with scarcely a break. I will one day time him by my watch, and find out how many chirps he makes to the minute, and how many in a day.

This is a far cry from Paris of 1904. I came into this room, sat down and dispersed a disbelief that I was ever there. Sounds of the leaves become a mere background to memories which come forward. I see the statue of Danton in the Boulevard St Germain – his arm raised on high, his thick lips apart as he rolls out, 'The first thing for the people after bread is education'.

That is the form of sculpture I love: a dramatic moment of the past expressed in bronze. What a magnificent figure on a worthy pedestal! (How different from the plain, starved, post-looking, white affair on which Roosevelt stands in Grosvenor Square.)

Paris is full of these glories of sculpture. On many a Saturday we journeyed from Place to Square; to the Tuileries and gardens of the Luxembourg, gazing at this statue and that, holding art conferences. Perhaps Marshal Ney was favourite. It may be that his courageous and romantic career counted a lot; for these rounds might include a look in at the Invalides. Who would not succumb to glories of the Empire after such a visit?

In the Sculpture Hall of the Luxembourg we drifted from one lovely nude to another, our minds unassailed by modern abortions. Few disturbing thoughts had occurred in Paris, so far as we were concerned, about the painting of pictures. Such violent reaction against prettiness has taken place since then that one wishes the old Bougereau nudes back again to make sure whether they were so utterly bad.

On my later visits to Paris I found the Luxembourg Galleries filling with strange work. Distorted drolleries were spreading everywhere, except in parts

of the Louvre. It gives me more pleasure to recall those Saturdays and Sundays in the autumn of 1904 than my later visits to old haunts. Better than reading stories or histories, better even than anything a student could do, were these happy hours spent among the French pictures of that period. If our desires were for pictures and sculpture rather than St Cloud or Versailles, we could satisfy them in abundance in Paris. Our minds, too, were not then disturbed by fast and crazy motor traffic, or our nostrils filled with petrol fumes, which increase in virulence until trees wither and die on the boulevards. Young people today can never imagine what Paris was like so long ago.

Julian's in the Rue du Dragon soon became a second home. It freed us from Morgue-created terrors. All were friends. Some advanced students were painting the most wonderful studies. Large canvases surprised us with their truth, drawing and colour.

The enormous ground-floor *atelier* where I worked was visited then by two professors, M. Bachet and M. Scohmmmer. Bougereau came seldom, only to say, 'Pas mal'. At the far end the sculptors were at work. The walls were covered below with palette scrapings, and above with paintings of the nude. Two of these, framed and glazed, were masterpieces by a past student who died young.

On certain Mondays models turned up to be chosen for the next fortnight. Each mounted the throne, one after the other, amid cries of approval or dissent. I felt sorry for the poor women who were too unattractive to please. In this choosing one noticed how different in colour and tint all these models were. Race was the reason. Some were white, others brown, yellow or even pale green.

Ranging from aged and middle-aged to young, the students were from all countries. The Americans were the richer, and often occupied fine studios, living in state and luxury, while other fellows barely existed. Seventy odd pounds in Barclays Bank at Harleston filled me with all the confidence I needed. The Hotel Jacob cost little; we all ate our *déjeuner* at some place on the Boulevard St Germain. Youth, enthusiasm and small expenses bore us along week by week.

Versailles was our place on a fine day. If dull, or if the mood seized us, we went through the Palace and talked of Marie Antoinette and the Revolution. Always we found our way to the gallery where huge battle-pictures hung, painted by Alphonse de Neuville and Aimé Morot, two artists famous in the days of 1870.

What pictures these were! The 'Charge of the Cuirassiers' at Reichshoffen measured thirty feet in length. The wounded grey horse on its back in the foreground is life-size. What arguments there were in front of these canvases!

A callous, modern-minded American would drawl: 'But . . . see . . . these shure are oanlee ill-us-traytions.'

'Illustrations be damned!' said I, full of the terrific achievement and vast knowledge displayed in these great pictures.

I still have three photographs of Morot's battle charges of 1870 framed here; and, often looking at them, I recall how I never could find the gallery over the chapel where the largest hung. Going up to an attendant, I would begin: 'Monsieur, s'il vous plaît, où est le tableau par Aimé Morot,' etc., etc., which, of course, the attendant failed to understand. Then I tried again, or even twice. Suddenly the fellow would brighten and say, 'Ah, oui, Monsieur! Ah, oui, je comprends,' etc.

Then I would find the stairs and arrive breathless in front of the 'Charge of the Cuirassiers', astounded for the twentieth time. I was spellbound at every visit, though others were never impressed. Thus do we differ in our outlook.

As highbrows gloat and blink at a meaningless mix-up in a frame which is the only sound part of it, this heroic attempt at an heroic subject is despised and forgotten. Such an effort requires a lifetime's study and knowledge. Drawing is the first item in the artist's list of accomplishments. Without that item it would be useless for a man to begin such a task. Only an artist born of a military nation could conceive the tragic moment – the mad rush, the fury, the fright, all shown on this wide canvas. I wondered where all Morot's first drawings and designs would be. How large were they? How did he paint the studies for the wounded horses?

The answer to this was given me when, on a later visit to Paris, I was shown some marvellously set-up models of horses in galloping positions, which were made by the only specialist of that day. A chestnut and bay, saddled and bridled and posed at a gallop, stood in a friend's studio where I was often invited during my stays at Chantilly in the 1920's. These were the remnants of the studio properties of Détaillé; their heads, necks and limbs movable, like a lay-figure. Yet they were covered in their skin, with mane, tail and full glass eye all complete.

These blissful Paris experiences must be ended. The last scene of many – a studio in the Rue de Seine. A dark and stinking stone stair led up and up until, with shaking thighs, breathless and beaten, one arrived and knocked at a door on a stone landing. Three artists occupied this garret of a place. A stove stood in the middle upon a slab of stone. Its chimney-pipe went up almost to the blackened ceiling; and, taking a sharp turn, continued on and out through the wall.

It was over this stove-pipe, after we had eaten a stuffed duck and beans, that one of the three painters showed us how to toss pancakes; and he did toss them – from the pan over the pipe, catching them in the pan again as they came down. No mean feat.

To this same studio, on a Saturday night – or Sunday morning, in the early hours before dawn – several of us, after a carousal, carried one of the three, Beaumont, up those narrow, stinking stairs, laid him on his bed, seemingly unconscious, and began undressing him. As his trousers were being pulled off, we heard him murmuring, 'T'morrer's Zunday, t'morrer's Zunday.' With this we left him and his comrades and made for our own beds.

The next morning, with aching heads, some of us took a look in at Julian's, where on Sundays students competed in making an *équisse* or painting of a subject taken from the Bible. Imagine the shock, the surprise, which was ours when we beheld Beaumont painting away at his picture. The subject that day was 'Christ Walking on the Sea'. He had almost finished his design. He was bright of eye and entirely recovered, having been violently ill after we had gone. We, badly piqued, with aching heads – wilting in this heated, stale, paint-smelling atmosphere – were eager and anxious to get out into the fresh air. Later we sought and found restoration in the park of St Cloud, deciding that such nights were harmful, foolish and bad.

The truest pleasures were found working in Julian's or Colorossi's, or in days spent at Fontainebleau, Chantilly, Versailles, St Cloud or in such places as St Rémy Chevreuse, where we sketched poplars in the valley or ruminated on the thickness of the walls of an ancient *château*.

French rivers flow lazily along between tall poplars. In my later wanderings I have longed to paint the Oise or the valley of the Eure, where a painter of landscape would never cease to find subjects to please his mind. On my homeward journey, via Dieppe and Newhaven, the French landscape was so beautiful that I became restless and sad, gazing at it from a third-class window. Rows of poplars were left behind as the train travelled on to the coast. I have never taken that route again.

How I ended that particular journey by London to far-off Norwich I have entirely forgotten. The French landscape and Normandy poplars in late autumn are all that I remember of it.

This spell at Julian's *atelier* in the Rue du Dragon was in the autumn of 1903, for in the winter of that year, under the influence of Lucien Simon, I painted a large picture called 'Leaving the Fair', which, with others, was not hung in 1904, leaving only 'Whitsuntide' to carry on the succession of exhibits.

XVII

MAKING A LANDSCAPE PICTURE

As experiences accumulate, the painter of landscape and figures gradually finds ways and means to carry out his purpose. His intentions and desires are more often frustrated than fulfilled. Looking at pictures of this kind, it should not be difficult to tell which were done either on the spot or from studies.

The truest and most satisfying form of landscape and figure-painting has been achieved only through endless trouble taken, apart from the actual technique. Whatever the results, in studio or open-air work, the latter is the more awkward to battle with and master – so difficult that if a young artist were too aware of what is ahead he might never dare begin. A combination of youthful vanity and ignorance leads on to defeat and disaster or success. I use the word ‘success’ only in this respect: that fought-out struggles, resulting in the gain of design, tone, colour, light, values, drawing and perspective, should be allowed the flattery of that word, if only in small measure.

In making pictures inspired by something seen, many artists of the past encountered and overcame disheartening obstacles. Their struggles are unknown to us as we glance at this picture or that. We may get a glimmering of resolution and perseverance underlying style or technique if we stay long enough and begin wondering how it was done. So long as the visual arts continue, one generation must learn from the last.

In my early days, a generation of artists in Europe, carrying on from the last, were doing work which was shown with pride in art galleries. These pictures needed no lecturer to explain their merits. Noble efforts by the artists of a nation, once shown so well, are now discarded as ‘old-fashioned’ and replaced by a form of art that flourishes only through clever propaganda. But the attraction is only momentary. Like a poor story, they do not tempt a public twice.

If, deeply desiring to look once again into a favourite book, we should find it gone from the shelf and replaced by one we could neither read nor understand, how bitter would be our disappointment! In galleries here and abroad we may arrive today in exultant anticipation, but what a setback is ours! Our senses,

alert to the pleasures to come, receive a blow beyond description. Seeking a vanished picture leaves me in blank despair. Good paintings kept their places in the days I write of, and were there to look at again. If some gave way to fresh additions, these latter were first-class. The younger artist, influenced by a variety of the very best work, was inspired to carry on. It is natural to emulate and compete.

Eager to begin, to enter the fray again after thinking a lot in front of fine pictures, I determined to do that which lay nearest. This is why I sought out the Grays and others who were not regularly employed, who were their own masters and who were glad of the money I paid them as models. Once in a groove of work, one thing led to another, and fresh motifs (as they called them in Paris) grew. A wealth of subjects, vain ambitions, will conquer slothfulness and force an artist up in the morning. Without imposing any severity on himself, he strives, and so learns to see with a new eye. This stage of seeing, when reached, is like a dawn which, growing, shows us more and still more.

During those years, Mendham village, its corners, by-lanes and meadows were my painting-grounds. In or out of sight of a road or footpath, a canvas and easel, with models posing as I worked, became an everyday occurrence. A passer-by said 'Good morning', but no more thought of staying to take a look than he would at a man cutting a fence. The Red Lion meadow was my workshop for two whole summers. Gray's caravans, shooting-galleries and swing-boats stood there.

There are places where I can work and places where I cannot work. This Red Lion meadow had a true bohemian air. Quarts of beer or shandy-gaff in a jug were brought out. Gray smoked his clay pipe, and all went well. Here was the first try-out of a skewbald pony in a picture.

These memories were started quite suddenly when out riding, 20th June 1947, as I stayed my horse in a grass lane by a gate. I was trying hard to recollect things when the sight of a distant field of poppies brought back a forgotten ride to Bungay and another field of poppies.

There was in that town of Bungay a dealer in antiques named Watts. He owned a small succession of shops where he stored and sold anything from antiques to bedding, old iron and earthenware. In a small end room he cut hair. On this occasion he cut my hair, and I bought the walnut bureau with William Palleday's name in the middle small drawer.

He delivered the bureau. The little horse he drove was a skewbald. When passing the Red Lion, he saw me at work, left his cart and came into the meadow. Being as good a dealer in horses as he was a cutter of hair, he was soon offering me the skewbald. My indulgence in Red Lion beer, his chatty talk and beady eyes were, no doubt, the cause of the deal which I made with him. The sun shone. We all drank draught ale. The landlady had one. The daughter had one. Charlotte came back from washing in the backyard of the Lion and joined in. Watts wanted ten pounds for the horse. In a weak moment I offered him ten pounds for the horse and the bureau, and he took it.

Fred Gray went and fetched the horse next day, bearing a cheque I could ill afford, but as soon as I saw it out in a field with Gray's ponies I knew it would bring me luck.

That little horse was an inspiration to me, if ever I had one. He became a new light in my life, a tyrant I could not resist. A common sight at a horse fair was a row of ponies standing head towards a fence. 'Ponies at a Fair', hung on the line at the Academy, 1906, was the picture I began with when I bought the skewbald. He was the foreground horse at the end of the row. The fence was the one between the Lion meadow and the churchyard. The draughts of shandy-gaff were the true painters' potion in those sunny, far-off days of July. Ponies dozing, stamping, dozing. Fred Gray being painted as he lay on the grass by the fence, and father Gray brushing away flies with sprigs of elder. The father smoking his clay, the son his cigarette, myself painting away in blissful assurance as the shandy-gaff flowed and green lights reflected under the white belly of the Bungay skewbald.

Seeing the field of poppies today brought back the Flixton road, on the way to Bungay. Then came Watts, the pony and the rest.

By then I was finding it saved time to work from my own models. I had bought a small chestnut pony with a light mane and tail. It came from Drake, one of many horse-copers using the Fox and Goose Inn in Ber Street, a resort of the trotting fraternity in Norwich. He became my procurer of models.

'Hey, Mr Munnings, I got yew a nice sort to paint,' became a familiar greeting at Spelman's sale-ground on a Saturday.

'Let's have a look,' I would say.

'They're down by the Bell' – and one of the droves near the Castle terrace, where the road passes by the Bell Hotel, would be pointed out, and soon I would see the proposed model.

Such a plan suited me, for I changed a pony for another, after giving it a pleasant life for two months or longer, Drake always drawing more money. I dealt with him for another skewbald, a warrior of a pony; a rich dark brown-and-white creation, and the most villainous. He frightened us all one day, screaming with rage, spraying urine and kicking. He broke the shafts of a cart in ten seconds.

'Now,' says Gray, 'did anyone ever see such a s—d?'

'Well,' said Charlotte, 'he's dangerous.'

But what a model! Sleek and handsome. Perhaps too sleek to be picturesque. I used him a lot, and often rode him at a canter through every parish in the neighbourhood. He condescended to carry a man, but absolutely refused to pull a cart.

It is pleasant to remember one picture which gave me no unhappy moments. It was of Charlotte leading the chestnut pony along that well-used, well-clipped fence. The blue blouse and white apron on her tall, stout figure made the picture. With silver ear-rings and black silk neckerchief she looked a swell.

'Lord, Charlottel' I cried, 'what a grand woman you are!'

'Don't tell th' owd fule that,' said Gray.

She wore no hat to shade her brown face and shiny black hair drawn tightly back in a small bun showing the shape of her head. The picture was called 'Charlotte's Pony', and was hung on the line in the second room at the Academy in 1907.



Brightworthy Crossing – pencil drawing

XVIII

PAINTING ON A SUNDAY

SUNDAY morning, 4th July 1948. Ardleigh church bells are sounding over the hill. Their peals stir the memory on summer evenings, and coming and going on the wind:

Swell out and fail, as if a door
Were closed between me and the sound.

They brought back the Sunday when I was painting a grey cart-mare, and my father, passing on his way to church, declared I should never prosper if I painted on a Sunday. The sounds of bells then came from Redenhall church. The tower with its four pinnacles showed over the hill beyond the river, which he crossed in a kind of ferry-boat working on a chain from bank to bank.

I see my father's receding figure and grey top hat growing smaller across the far pastures, and recall my queer feelings of doubt, a sort of chilly fear which went down my spine as I asked myself the question whether I should stop work and prosper, or get on with it and risk the consequences.

Who can turn back on a journey started? I went on until the fellow holding the mare had to go to dinner, and just as my parent came home late. It was Sacrament Sunday.

Sacrament Sunday are two words that fill me with awe. Often, instead of letting us go, we had to sit in the pew and watch this strange ceremony going on in the chancel, seeing my father walk solemnly up the aisle, and seeing William Riches, the other churchwarden, in his light, tight check Sunday trousers and black coat, tiptoeing with his bonneted wife back to their pew, his eyes fixed on the ground, his head bowed, the rest all doing the same. What it all meant we did not know.

I felt a villain when my work was over on that Sunday, although I had resisted my fluctuating conscience by murmuring to myself, 'Persevere, persevere. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."'

But why I really felt a villain was because I had begged and persuaded my father to buy this fine grey mare so that I could have her to paint, and there was I having her held on a Sunday and painting her in spite of his noble deed. His deed was more than noble, for he was against grey horses. The carters

disliked them because they showed a dirt stain, hard to wash out, on their quarters from lying in the stable.

My position was a doubtful one, but a sense of duty urged me to continue. Was I not seizing an opportunity? The mare and the man holding her would both be at work all the week. Here they were at home, and it was a fine day, and the sun shining. I had started, and when started you should never turn back. Of course I wondered – even then, at the age of twenty-three or twenty-four – what the Almighty would do about it and whether I should be allowed to prosper.

How long ago it all seems! I remember accompanying my father in the drive to the farm when he went to buy the mare, he asking me whether she would make a good picture. I can't believe that any son had a kinder father. He was anything but a 'wealthy miller', continually being hit by bad debts and cutting of prices by the large mills in towns like Ipswich or Norwich.

The mare replaced another grey which worked trace in a wagon-team of three, and which was handed over to the glebe, then farmed separately by my mother, who ran a red-polled herd. This mare had black legs and dappled quarters, and was the first grey I ever tried to paint. She appeared in water-colours in the Royal Institute of Painters again and again.

In the end there must have been something in what my sad parent prophesied, because that particular picture, with the new grey mare in it, was not hung in the Academy. Although I thought it my number one, it was not. A judgment!

I feel like reflecting on grey horses yet awhile. Looking at photographs of the Preston picture, 'The Last of the Fair', my mind records that the old white pony with forelock and mane was none other than the grey belonging to my landlord, Mr Alfred Wharton, who farmed Shearing's Farm, and who rented the half of the house to me at ten pounds a year. He it was who followed my grandmother as tenant of Walsham Hall Farm. He was one more of the many kind friends I seem to have made use of, for I was always painting that white pony. No telephone existed then. I either rode up and saw Alfred Wharton, or sent Fred Gray on a bicycle if I wanted it.

Another beautiful grey was the property of Ben Cook. The buttercup picture was not the only painting of her, and she was first-rate as a picture horse. No artist ever dreamed of a better. She came from the London General Omnibus Company and had worked on the all-white-horse route between Liverpool Street and Putney.

Mention of those buses recalls my first quaking visit to the Academy. How safe was I on the top of one of these and assured of getting to Piccadilly? What good sort of men those bus-drivers were! None would have spoken as the stage-coachmen did to George, 'Don't you think because you ride on my mail I'm going to talk to you about 'orses.'

What crowded traffic blocks! Did they ever exist? Were all those hooves once pounding up and down the Strand?

All have passed, like a dream. The greys of the Putney Buses No. 14 were the same type, bred in Ireland for the purpose. The right thing is always forthcoming when there is a demand for it. The grey boulannaise stallions, three abreast in the huge Paris omnibuses, astonished me, but our pairs of grey geldings, or mares, drawing smaller vehicles, were more workmanlike.

I have often wondered what sort of grey it was that Jack Spraggon rode in the great run with the Flat-hat Hunt in *Mr Sponge's Sporting Tour*.

'Sing out, Jack! for heaven's sake, sing out!' exclaimed Lord Scamperdale . . . always as eager for a run as if he'd never seen one. *'Hold hard, gentlemen,'* roared Jack, *clapping spur into his grey, or rather his lordship's grey, dashing in front and drawing the horse across the road to stop the progression of the field.* Then, hounds having got away and Lord Scamperdale and his huntsman, Frostyface, well on the line, Spraggon also turns his horse and gallops off, exclaiming: *'Now, ye tinkers, we'll all start fair.'*

May my pen not carry me too exuberantly into these scenes, so well portrayed by the great Surtees.

Ben Cook's grey mare and those other grey models were superseded by another purchase – a white pony, who became part of my existence some years later, finally pulling my mother about in her small four-wheeled open pony-carriage. When staying at home, I have driven with her at two and a half miles an hour, the reins carried over a high, steel, fork-like affair in front, the pony's tail and quarters well above the eyeline, as we sat in the low vehicle and crawled along.

This pace suited the dogs, one of them being Friday. During my absence in Paris he had made himself at home at the mills, and found that these leisurely journeys in company with other dogs just suited his taste. There was much more time for hunting every hedge, ditch and field, and however far the four-wheeled tortoise had gone ahead, it was child's play to regain the place in front held by the dogs, which, for some unknown and inconceivable reason, periodically affected a manner of running on three legs, carrying a hind one awhile.

I called that particular pony Augereau. But more of him anon.

XIX

EDWARD ADCOCK: EARLY PATRON AND FRIEND

It would take a volume rather than a chapter to describe in detail small commissions received in my youth. One must suffice. It came from Boswells. Here's a picture of Boswells as it was then. Large plate-glass windows. The door in the centre with the name Boswell above, in gold letters. It is the most distinguished-looking shop in London Street; and no wonder, seeing there's a Crome landscape in the left window and a Romney lady on the right. How bright and clean the plate glass! I walk in.

'Is Mr Jim about?'

'Yes,' says Henry the shopman.

Along comes Mr Jim Boswell, a stout, jolly soul with a large, bald head and bright eyes.

'Hal' says he, 'the very man. You got my letter? Now I want you to paint some cattle for a customer. You're to stay there and do the picture. I'll give you ten pounds. Only about a twenty-five-inch canvas. Is that settled?'

'Yes. When do I go?'

'Soon as you can,' says Jim. 'You've to do this at Breckles Hall [I think it was] - for Prince Frederick Duleep Singh.'

I had never stayed with a nobleman or a prince - or with the county, either. At the time I was about twenty-three.

Testing my memory, I see the dog-cart and man at the station; I see Prince Frederick at the Hall - rather short, stoutish, going bald; dark, melancholy eyes; a dreamer and an antiquary. After dinner he played and sang, in a good baritone. One song I've never forgotten, by Goring Thomas, 'A Summer Night'.

'I don't think I did that too well,' said the Prince.

Again, with feeling, he was singing, 'Don't you remember?' etc.

The bull and cows that I painted were the last of an ancient breed of Suffolk dun-coloured, polled cattle. I stayed in that beautiful house, filled with pictures and treasures, for nearly a week painting the picture. Soon after this he wrote to say he was coming to Harleston to inspect a squadron of Suffolk

Hussars, and might he call at my studio in Mendham? He came, and even went into my rooms in the farm. I was quite thrilled at such a visit. He was interested in some old pewter. Whenever I see a certain piece standing here, I recall how he looked at the maker's mark on it.

'It is by John Fasson,' said the Prince.

Before getting into the tall dog-cart from the Magpie Hotel, Harleston, he told me again how delighted he was with the cattle-picture.

'Would you mind if I asked you how much you were paid for doing it?'

'Ten pounds,' I replied.

'Dear me!' said he sadly. 'Well——' and then left.

A charming letter came later from him enclosing five pounds. Would I accept this small amount? he felt that the payment I had received was inadequate. I was well satisfied at the time, and it was the sum I had agreed to accept.

Among the outside distractions that broke into my routine, none was more welcome than the visits of Edward Adcock, an old Norwich friend. He was one who indulged in a good, full way of living. Food, wine, furniture, pictures, were all to his liking. Often did I stay with this jolly patron and his wife in their nice house on the Newmarket road – perhaps too often. He was one of the first in Norwich to own a Silent Night Minerva, a glorious car which sent up columns of dust. Driving it himself, nobody knew where we went or what we did. Stopping at this inn or that, looking at churches, seeking antiques. He would send me a wire, and arrive with a honk of his horn outside the studio gate, a great basket of food and champagne in the car, and a cheque-book in his pocket.

Sometimes I went back with him to his well-run house and good wife. We played bowls on the lawn. Pianola parties and sprees piled up as he increased his fortune. A more generous yet more business-like soul I never met; he was part of the core of provincial England.

Like the alderman of Preston, he drove a hard bargain. Sitting in a chair in my studio as I placed each painting before him in turn, he treated the pictures he liked with derision, and finally bought them for very little. Who knows? They may have been dear, even at a low figure. But they were at least sincere efforts.

'Well, Alfred,' said my friend Edward, 'what about that one with the funny sky and the caravans? Who's the bloke with the horse? If you don't value it I'd give you ten quid for it.'

'Edward, my dear fellow! I can't take that.'

'Well, Alfred, what about these two and that? 'Now,' as he placed them together, 'I'll give you eighty pounds for these six.'

Heavens! what a lot of money! what opportunities! what fortunes!

'Make it a hundred.'

'No, I'll tell you what I'll do,' as he filled my glass, 'I'll give you ninety pounds.'

'Well,' said I, 'let me think.'

In the end it was settled; but later the price was forced up by the brothers Boswell. Jim Boswell, with his fat, generous stomach, and busy countenance, and bright brown eye, said one day:

'Munnings, why don't you paint horses pulling a great tree-trunk on a timber-gill? If you do, I'll buy it! Look,' he added, 'here's the very frame!' – showing me a magnificent, old, gilded swept frame – 'a fifty-forty! The very size. I'll have a canvas made for it.'

I did paint the picture of a timber-gill drawn by a team of horses. The elms in the background, 'with autumn laying here and there a fiery finger on the leaves', stood not far away from the farmhouse in which I lived. I see myself arriving at the spot with a new wooden box as used by my Paris friends. The October sun was at the right angle, and there I made a thirty-by-twenty-five upright study of those autumn trees. A chestnut cart-horse of my father's posed as leader of the team, with another and the grey in the shafts. I cycled up to Metfield, where a carpenter had a timber-gill. I found and treated him and, returning jovial with beer, free-wheeled down the hill, bumped over a row of mud-scrappings and sat in the brook at the bottom. The next day I was back in his yard making a painting of his timber-gill. The result of all this was a fifty-by-forty upright in the grand manner, with Norman in his smock walking at the head of the team. The fine, old, gilded, swept frame from Boswells made it. The masterpiece framed and placed on an easel in my studio, I wrote and told my friend and the Boswells it was on view.

A lunch-party at Harleston Swan was followed by a show of the picture, and a disagreement. My patron, Edward, wanted it, and offered me more money.

'It isn't playing the game,' said Jim Boswell.

In the end I kept it, and sold them other works. Eighty pounds was a big sum; these buyers hesitated, and no wonder.

How long after I do not recall, but during my years at Swainsthorpe, a builder of means, who lived somewhere on Unthank Road – not far from the imposing new Roman Catholic cathedral just then finished – settled to give me eighty-five pounds for that picture. It was sent for and hung, and I walked up one evening at the invitation of the builder (who was a Methodist and abstainer, which shows his judgment must have been sober and sound), and there on his plush-covered table he counted and paid me eighty-five golden sovereigns and put them in a bag and gave them to me. By the time I arrived at my rooms in Prince of Wales Road the weight of gold in my pocket began to tell. With what satisfaction did I place the bag on the counter of Barclays next morning!

That is the story of the timber-gill picture, when one hundred pounds was a great amount of money and went a very long way, bringing with it security and a slight independence.

Patrons increased. I made more use of the rooms I had taken in Prince of

Wales Road, and sold work, and held convivial evenings there, too. Then came further changes, another trip to Germany, and a short period in Paris.

I do not avoid the confession – and let it be short – of how, before leaving, I rode the little bay mare up to Norwich to be sold at Spelman's Sale. Looking back, I try to soothe my conscience by thinking her life after that was more to her liking, standing in a hunt stable and carrying the whip of the Suffolk Hounds. Horses are gregarious, and like to hear others moving and eating in the next box or stall. Still more do they love a hunt. But for all that, I should never have sold her. I am making up for this now in keeping my old friends who have kept me. I have sold only four horses in my life, and she was one of them!

The trip across Germany with Shaw Tomkins took us to Amsterdam, Berlin, Dresden, Munich, Nürnberg, Coburg, Lichtenfels and Frankfurt this time.

We spent days in the Pinakotheks, old and new. We saw more 'Tintoretto's than it seemed possible for any one master to have painted. In Dresden there were large new paintings which literally took my breath away. Where can they be now? At a contemporary exhibition in Munich we saw such masterly performances in paint, such vividly seen subjects of peasant life – one of a bull in particular – that I gave up all hopes of ever being anybody at all.

There were open-air schools of painting in Europe then, and all were on the true path. The old Norwich School and the Art Circle faded away into insignificance as I stood gaping in front of a huge canvas of a girl walking towards me through luminous greenery which looked as though it were done in a single painting. Another was of some Baltic fishermen in the late evening light – the men coming ashore in their boat on the crest of a wave, all life-size. The wave in the near corner must have been painted with a brush six inches wide. I still have a small coloured reproduction of this framed at my bedside. It had gone one – and even two – beyond anything of our Newlyn School.

I journeyed through Switzerland, once more to land in Paris; and from the sleeper that morning I got into a *fiacre* with my bag and arrived, to the surprise of my friends, in the courtyard of their new studio high up in the Rue de Seine. It was cleaner than the last foul spot they inhabited!

Comparatively wealthy, with a safe banking account, I had purchased a beautiful pair of ducks and other things on the way from the station. My welcome was such that we all dashed out to a bois-and-charbon shop opposite the courtyard, and not only drank either absinthe or some strong aperitif, but bore bottles of wine up that stone stair, chanting an air we used to sing at Julian's.

After a real blow-out we subsided on beds or chairs in bloated ease and smoked, while I held forth on the pictures I had seen in Dresden and Munich. On the morrow, once more in front of 'La Procession' by Lucien Simon and work by Bastien Lepage, Gaston la Touche, Fantin Latour, Lhermitte and

other masters of that period, I lost myself in profound contentment and admiration. What are pictures for? To fill a man's soul with admiration and sheer joy, not to bewilder and daze him. I worked again for a few weeks at Julian's – what an *atelier* that was! – and saw pictures and yet more pictures in the galleries.

Never-fading memories like these I carried back to Mendham, and sat many a long evening reading alone, with Joe in the other easy-chair, until at last Mrs Corbyn came in with the candlestick and said good night.



XX

ALBY HORSESHOES

THOMAS HARDY wrote:

War makes rattling good history;
But peace is poor reading.

For me, the relations of outdoor enterprises are more exciting to recall and write about than indoor periods of routine.

Preliminary preparations and precautions against difficulties which came between me and my object – to work out of doors – were more exciting than getting ready in a studio. With frequent spells of work away from home the years at Swainsthorpe sped quickly. I have been suddenly reminded of one of those spells.

The other day a Bond Street dealer forwarded a photograph of one of my pictures. It had been sent from America, and he was asked to find out if I painted it. Seeing this forgotten picture of a lad with ponies in a grassy lane, the long-buried past was flashed back as clearly as though it were only yesterday.

One Saturday in September, more than forty years ago, I saw Drake in the sale yard near the Bell Hotel at Norwich. He was with the usual throng of horse-dealers and trotting fraternity of the Fox and Goose, Ber Street.

'Mr Munnin's,' said he, staring with his queer blue eyes, 'me and the missus and kids with the caravan and hosses are up near Alby. There's a common with geese, ducks, cows, ponies, and I don't know what else, for ye to paint; and you'll see all sorts of blokes at the Horseshoes. Why don't ye come for a week?'

Looking at the gold ring on one of his brown fingers, then at the long, brass-bound whip, at the black silk handkerchief round his neck, I hesitated. This needed consideration.

'I'll meet ye at Aylsham station with a hoss and cart,' said he.

Drake and I had one thing in common – a love of life. He knew we'd have a good time if I went to Alby, and, after all, what sort of ties or responsibilities had I? None.

Sure enough, on the Monday he met me and my belongings, and drove me

through that beautiful country. Across the years I cannot see the Horseshoes as distinctly as the Falcon at Costessey. I remember a wide green thereabouts with grazing ponies, cows, donkeys and geese. As I write I long to return and see if memory tallies with the real scene.

Arriving at the Horseshoes, I met one of Drake's myrmidons – an under-sized, tough, artful young brigand. He slept under the caravan with the dogs, and had no home of his own, no family ties, no parents that he knew. This son of the wild went by the name of Shrimp. Little did I dream that he would one day become for me an indispensable model, an inspiring rogue, and an annoying villain.

To return to the picture of ponies in a lane. When looking at it, the slumbering cells of memory are so stirred that I recall the painting of every passage in it. The calm, grey sky, the grass banks, not a leaf stirring in the fence; the ponies, the lad in the foreground, for which Shrimp sat, and how afterwards I put my groom, George, there instead. A good portrait of him, although disguised in a sleeve waistcoat. I recall, too, the Horseshoes and queer blokes I was to meet; the intelligent lurchers, and one in particular, which kept Drake's family in a state of good living – Mrs Drake could cook a hare or pheasant. I see myself with Drake standing at a gate in the moonlight. His dog is coming towards us through the brittle stubble. It carries a hare, which Drake puts into the large pocket in the skirt of his coat; the lurcher pants behind us as we walk back. On the way another hare is found, coursed and caught, 'and still the same calm moon'.

'Ain't it a lovely night?' said Drake.

He was partial to pints of ale, and his pipe, and a night at an inn; he also had the true instincts of a countryman as well as a love of life. My little companion, Joe, was with me then, as he was on other jaunts, seen but not heard, and never in the way. A small, wise dog, regarding no person but myself. On moonlight nights he never left my heels, not even when the lurcher was out.

A week later I travelled back, in beautiful weather, in company with Drake and his family and horses, sleeping under a hedge at night, wrapped in a horse-blanket which Drake had advised me to bring.

The picture in the lane is reproduced on another page for artist readers or others who may be interested. I wonder if the American who owns that humble effort will ever read my story of it.

XXI

STRAYED PONIES

IN the country I was at peace – but not all the time. Things happened which broke the serenity and interfered with determination to work on and on. I give an instance. It may have been a fortnight after the start of this plan when, on a fine June morning, I rode over, to find Bob and Shrimp anxiously awaiting me, with great concern on their unshaven faces. No ponies, no white mare in the long cart.

‘What’s happened?’ said I.

Both began the story, Bob stuttering. The ponies had got out through a gap in the hedge and were gone. What a shock! There sat I on the mare, speechless, frustrated, wanting to start work and yet baulked in this manner.

‘They got through the fence over there,’ said Shrimp. ‘I tracked ’em up through the woods across some wheat, over to a farm two miles away. They’re all locked in a horse yard, and the farmer wouldn’t let me take them away. He found ’em in the young wheat.’

Shrimp was in his sleeve waistcoat with black pearl buttons, wearing a yellow silk scarf and tight cord trousers, and two halters were round his shoulders. No wonder the man refused to let him take the ponies until the owner came to pay damages. Shrimp looked what he was, and was part of the thing; but what on earth did I look like? I hesitated about going to see the farmer as the owner of this mixed assembly. But it was a fine day; I must and had to paint.

‘Get up behind on the mare’, said I to Shrimp, ‘and take us to where they are.’

‘Oh, damn and blast!’ said I to Shrimp as we rode, Shrimp sitting behind, holding on to me.

But what a good mare! With the saddle I must have weighed twelve and a half stone, whilst Shrimp, another eight, brought our combined weights up to at least twenty. We galloped uphill, through a woodland track, even jumping a fallen tree, and out on to fields of young green corn.

‘Over yonder,’ said Shrimp, pointing to a distant farm and buildings.

Arriving, we found the farmer, who appeared to show no surprise at such a

queerly assorted pair on one horse. Over in the yard were all the strayed ponies; a padlock on the gate.

I explained to the farmer, who was not in the least interested in a man painting ponies on Ringland Hills. He was a dark, queer-looking fellow with black side-whiskers, and wore a bowler hat. After staring at me thoughtfully for a minute and then at the mare and then at my old flannel trousers, covered with dabs of paint, mostly gorse-yellow, he slowly said:

'They were on my corn, and nobody with them at five o'clock this morning, and I want ten shillings.'

'My dear sir,' said I, 'how kind of you to shut them up! I might have lost them. I'm willing to pay you anything. Now I must get to work.'

Here I offered the man a golden sovereign, but he only wanted ten shillings, and I paid him.

All was well. The farmer walked to the yard gate, produced the key from his pocket, unlocked the padlock, and opened the gate. Shrimp, who had brought two halters, put one on the dun pony and one on the grey mare, and, mounting the dun and leading the other, he started out, the rest scampering behind, whilst I brought up the rear and drove them along to the lane leading to the top of the hills.

In a very short space of time, though in a sweat, I was at work. This had been a considerable interruption to my effort.

There was another uproar when I lent Shrimp the little dun horse to go into Norwich to have a tooth pulled out which Bob had loosened. The dun returned that night, but without Shrimp. The fellow had been having a drinking bout, fallen off and slept under the fence!

This was more disturbing – no model. Had he known his value to me, Shrimp might have struck again and again for anything. This never entered his head, and as Bob and I were toiling to the hills with the cart and pictures, to my joy I heard a shrill whistle. Coming up the slope was Shrimp. As he joined us I looked with horror at his swollen eyes. What a sight!

'Cor,' said he, 'my 'ead don't 'arf ache.'

'Serve ye right,' said Bob.

'Don't be hard on him, Bob,' said I diplomatically and with cunning, for I had been afraid Shrimp had carried out his oft-repeated threat to run away. 'It was you, Bob, who loosened his tooth.'

Silence. A creaking of wheels and panting of the fat, grey mare as she pulled the cart, led by Shrimp. All a dream to me now. A queer trio, unlike anything ever seen on the hills. Myself on a respectable horse, wearing the worst of clothes: a white linen hat, flecked with paint, a coat fairly clean – at work I wore a long, holland painting coat, plastered mostly with yellow. My legs on either side of the saddle were in trousers of all colours; I believe I once sat on the palette in them. I wore old canvas shoes for comfort. Only one thing was fair to middling – my black-and-white-spotted tie.

Bob defies description. A sense of humour twinkled in his deep-set brown

eyes, shaded by heavy black eyebrows meeting across the bridge of his long nose. Humour lurked at the corners of his wide mouth. His stiff black hair, his sunburnt face and arms gave him the look of a tinker. This change from groom to vagabond had been so gradual that I was unaware of it until he called at the Falcon one evening with a message. The landlord showed great concern on learning that he was Mr Munnings' servant. I was rather staggered on seeing him in the Falcon's civilized surroundings. But he was a priceless fellow, and would and could do anything.

And so we trailed up the broken track, with blackbirds singing below and skylarks above. Three men with an outlandish purpose. Our spot reached, the canvas was soon set on a French easel. If the wind were brisk, Bob had a heavy stone on a line to hang down from the middle of the easel.

I always stood with the sunlight slanting from one side or other, if possible, the back of the easel covered with sheets of brown paper tucked in the stretcher, to prevent the sun shining through. These preparations done, work began, the lad holding a horse, and Bob keeping the flies away with a birch spray. At lunch time my packet of food was often a thick, cold pork chop, a pickled onion or two and half a small loaf. Bottled beer was in Bob's care, not Shrimp's!

If only it could all happen again! My pleasant rides to and from Ringland on horseback had to cease. Each morning, when arriving at the hills, the mare was unsaddled and tethered with a long line to an iron peg in the ground and left to graze. This served its purpose during the month of May, before the flies appeared; but after that the poor mare, having a docked tail, had no protection from the accursed pests, and so she stayed in her loose box at the Falcon, going out each night on the meadows by the river. My bicycle had been packed on the long cart, and I used the far handier and more easily-disposed-of horse. The Rover bike was stood in the shade of the caravan, and flies never worried it.

XXII

CAMPAIGNING AGAINST A SEA OF TROUBLES

IN an old set of volumes of the work of Robert Burns I found and read a chapter called 'Fragment'. Burns, an artist in words, begins thus:

As I have seen a good deal of human life in Edinburgh, a great many characters which are new to one bred up in the shades of life as I have been, I am determined to take down my remarks on the spot. Gray observes, in a letter to Mr Palgrave, that 'half a word fixed upon, or near the spot, is worth a cartload of recollection'.

These words from Gray to Palgrave, quoted by Robert Burns, would cheer the souls of artists who have tried to record their own vision, their way of seeing things. If they be out-door painters, they will indeed understand Gray's message.

How many have loved and have tried to paint the English scene, and in nine cases out of ten a sketch from Nature, however slight, however quickly done – be it only a note on a pochard panel – a panel fixed on a miniature box held on the thumb – of a stream, a sky, cattle in landscape – there is something in that work gained from Nature that baffles repetition in the studio, even after many years of practice. Often do we find amongst forgotten sketches something which, in its way, lords it over its maker. It shames our efforts away from Nature:

Thine own above thyself made lord, –
Of self-rebuke the bitterest.

A habit grew upon me which was as follows: whether painting gipsies at Epsom or in Hampshire, ponies and horses at Ringland or elsewhere, I never started a large picture until I had painted small canvases of thirty by twenty-five inches, or twenty-four by twenty inches. Of these, one or two might be worthy of a larger subject. I kept my belongings in a cottage or building near my painting-ground. There, on a wet day, I stretched bigger canvases and designed pale-red-and-white enlargements on them from smaller work.

Sir William Nicholson – a fine artist – told me often that it was easy to put on the paint if you knew where to put it. How true! Time is lost in endeavouring to retrieve a bad arrangement.

My morning or afternoon subject planned – whichever it happened to be – with a fifty-by-forty-inch canvas, I have sat or stood at the same place, in the same shadow of tree or fence, day by day, working out a picture passage by passage. With canvas all set, a half-bucket of water hung from the easel to steady it against a fitful breeze, palette and brushes ready; Mrs Stevens in a huge black hat with feathers posing in the September sunlight, the top half of her against the sky, her pink blouse lit, a bright green neckerchief on her shoulders. For one moment there arises a doubt. Shall I ever do this and all the rest? I begin on the black hat and her shaded features; I put in the ear-rings and the dark curls, and paint the light sky around the silhouetted head. My doubts are gone. A touch of best copal varnish as I paint the face. Then the green silk neckerchief and pink blouse: 'The pale cast of thought' disperses in action. Alas! those September days of painting in Hampshire; gone with the past. I will tell of these in their turn.

When I began this chapter, my intentions were to write of the troubles of open-air work.

'Look, sir,' Bob would say, as I worked away on the ridge of the hill at Ringland – 'look at them old clouds comin' up!'

'Oh, Bob,' I groaned, 'rot the clouds!'

'But they're goin' to stop us this time, sir,' said he.

'Oh, hell!' was my rejoinder.

And sure enough, just when I had got into my stride, in the very spirit of the picture – doing wonders, in fact – a cold blanket of forlorn misery was closing upon me. Clouds were slowly coming in succession, not followed by spaces of promising blue, but by formations that gave no hope. Fine, slowly moving clouds, trailing their shadows in succession on a fine day, did not hinder me. On the contrary, their shade gave me respite to see what I was doing, although I used a large painting umbrella. Bob would be right. The day changed. No artist can tell a layman of the hopeless blight that falls upon him with such a change. He is doomed, beaten; but only for the day. To the artist of experience there is a way out: he has with him his second canvas – his second string.

Always in that flat cart near by, in the shade, lay my other canvases, among them the grey subject, already well on its way, belonging to this same spot.

'Bob, help me!'

The discarded sunny picture is laid in the cart, the other placed on the easel, and again I am at work in the fresh mood, recovering from the setback. Deep in the grey picture, I am painting the distant belt of Taverham Woods on the skyline, seen below the bellies of the ponies standing on the ridge.

It was through a far worse defeat, a more bitter ending, that I made my large picture on that occasion at Ringland into the one now in Sydney Art

Gallery, entitled 'The Coming Storm'. Bob had warned me; Shrimp said he knew we were going to get it. I had gone on, aware of a portent in the air – hearing far-off booming of thunder; watching the ominous, dark storm-clouds gather and slowly advance. What a background!

'Bahl' said I, 'it will miss us!' Then I knew they were right. 'Help me with this,' I shouted.

In a minute everything was packed and covered over in the cart. And with a rattle of wheels and trotting feet, cart, ponies and all were gone. I watched them pass along the road below to the thatched lodge near by, and out of sight.

I remained with Joe to await the coming storm. After days of oppressive heat, I welcomed the sight of it, and, sweating in every pore, walked back on the plateau to a shed by some stacks at the entrance to the lane. The effect was spectacular. The sky dark; calamitous! Anything might happen. So sultry was the air that I flung off all my clothes, put them in the shed and stood naked in the warm, pelting rain. Young – regardless of health – putting on my canvas shoes, I strode across the open to the short turf, now like a lake, and frolicked, danced and sang. My dog, Joe, followed and watched me capering in the downpour. To the pealing of thunder I sang:

No eye to watch; and no tongue to wound us –
All earth forgot and all heaven around us.

Then, to the old 'Nuts and May' tune:

When we were young the only way
Was to finish a picture day by day;
Now we're old and turning grey
We polish it off in a morning,

and then marched about singing a music-hall song of the day:

I don't suppose he'll do it again
For months and months and months.

Keeping up the refrain, I went back to the shed and, drying myself on my old flannel trousers, got dressed. Incessant, flickering lightning accompanied the volleying thunder, and across the darkened valley –

Far flashed the red artillery.

What a storm! As the rain ceased, I remembered my bicycle left leaning against a silver birch. How much handier, I thought, than a horse. With the music-hall song still on my lips – 'I don't suppose he'll do it again for months and months and months' – I made for the Falcon.

And I never did do it again, and never shall. Sitting here late at night, that afternoon at Ringland seems a long way off. The wind outside in the trees moans fitfully:

I don't suppose he'll do it again
For months – and months – and months!

Such interruptions happen to the painter of the open. Sudden and soon gone, it was a fine sight. Hence the title for my large picture, 'The Coming Storm'.

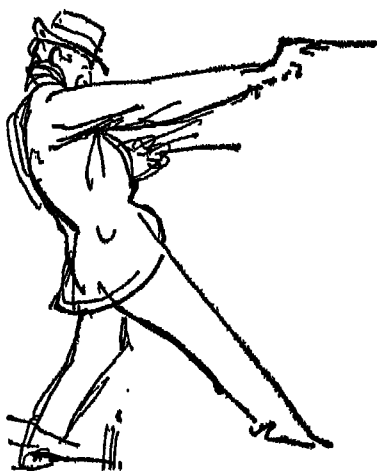
A more tantalizing, worrying enemy is the wind. Thank God for pleasant breezes which cool the brow. Too strong a breeze irritates. It moves the canvas like an unseen, disturbing sprite. With my helpers I fought this, and many other things. 'Continuez toujours,' as Bougercau used to say in Julian's *atelier*, when he came on his visit to the students.

A smaller canvas was easier, but I gained in the end. The difficulty often brought its reward. 'The Coming Storm' and other canvases strengthened my financial position years later, so that I could again repeat these expensive jaunts, and afford to do things which I wanted very much to do. The pictures I painted at this period were sold – many at my first Exhibition at the Leicester Galleries in London in 1912.

Although she is writing of another year, I here insert a portion of my mother's diary in which she refers to my state of mind – how can an artist ever be really happy?

Alfred has been over, he seems to be happy, at least, as happy as it is possible for him to be – he really very seldom appears quite satisfied or happy. This has been a terrible summer, except for one fortnight in the early part of July which was delightfully warm. We have had nothing but cold and wet, *August 26th*. We had twenty-four hours rain and an awful flood – the bridge broken down – of all of which I have kept records.

(This was the old iron bridge crossing the river on the road between Mendham and Harleston.)



XXIII

GOING OUT HUNTING

A COLD winter's morning at Church Farm; my breakfast – just an ordinary one of the period – had been two eggs and large rashers of good, home-cured bacon; a wood fire burned in the grate, and Joe sat watching the flames, knowing that this was not his day out. The room at the end of the passage was snug and cosy; not a care in my mind; not a letter on the table. I admired myself in the mirror; already I had blossomed out into what may be called 'a hell of a fellow'. I was dressed in the same style as the farmer members of that Hunt, known as the Norwich Staghounds – a black velvet cap on my head, a dark grey melton coat, white cord breeches, and boots with dark-brown tops. Already I was used to this natty costume. The years had flown. From a humble amateur wearing a grey whipcord suit, with bowler and leggings, I had grown to this, encouraged by the possession of the brown mare who had become my mainstay in the chase.

Not only did I possess this trusty friend; another and darker brown thoroughbred mare with a mane and long, banged tail stood in the next box. She had cost me only forty guineas at Spelman's sale, and knew more about hunting than I did. Her name was Rebecca. She had a fine head and eye, large ears and, unlike the other mare, was not disfigured by a hogged or shaved-off mane. But to the story.

On this particular day the Meet was at Wymondham, some eight miles off, and George, my good lad, came round to the door to see if I was ready to start. Going out through the side gate to the stables, I was soon mounted on a well-done, well-groomed, sound animal, which not only carried me hunting, but often served as a model. Fancying myself, I jogged on towards Mulbarton, taking the left-hand road from there onwards. Passing his gate, Millard, a farmer neighbour and friend, joined me. On the way others appeared; and so on to the King's Head at Wymondham, where the horses were taken round to the yard by various men under the head ostler, whilst their riders foregathered inside, drinking, talking, 'gassing' away – until the Master, Jack Cooke, who had gone out, reappeared and said, 'Well, gentlemen, the deer was enlarged twenty minutes ago'. The yard behind the hotel and the market-place in front were then all life and bustle.

Whips and hounds were gathered by the famous old market cross for a minute or so until the Master rode out on one of his large, useful horses. With hounds and hunt servants ahead, the cavalcade of farmers, a doctor or two, a squire or two, a butcher, perhaps, a veterinary, some hard-riding ladies; and last but not least, cavalry officers in scarlet from the Norwich Barracks, who had driven out in a four-in-hand – all followed with a clatter into the country and to the field where the deer had been enlarged.

There was a thrill of expectancy about it all. Those wishing to show their prowess rode into the meadow where hounds were laid on, whilst others stayed on the road, leading the line of carts and gigs driven by folk who wanted to see the sight. Cunning riders were out to watch which way hounds were going to run, whilst the brave faced the first stiff fence and ditch out of the meadow and followed hounds.

For half an hour it was a fast hunt, and scent good. Being on a clever animal, I could get across that country as well as many others. It is easy to ride a 'made' horse. The jumping in that part of Norfolk was mostly a small bank with a low-cut fence and a wide, deep field ditch, either on the take-off or landing side. A good horse did it easily. But who is this coming along, addressing me as 'Sponge my lad'? It is Dick Bullard, who sold me the brown mare. He is no longer selling horses at Old Catton, but is living at Thorpe, with meadows and stabling there. Although still in a precarious position financially, he is in a more certain way of life than before, and is riding some horse or other for sale, and enjoying a spell out. Sam Kidman – the adventurous, tall, long-legged Sam – moustached, black-capped, and in white breeches, is calling to his big horse, which is inclined to be careless, to 'hold up!' There is Stephen Sutton on the roan; George Gowing, the secretary, known as 'Snap-eye', sitting well forward on his safe conveyance, blowing out his cheeks as he goes; far ahead the Master is leading at what appears to be a slow canter. Paddy Cox follows behind, bathed in perspiration, and so the Hunt passes, strung out, from parish to parish.

Unlike a fox hunt, they go on and on if a good deer is out. Church steeples show ahead, and are left behind. Through quiet villages and farms we clatter on into the open country again. The pace slackens to a check. Again hounds are on the line, and so, hugging headlands and furrow on the ploughland, and sailing on across pastures and a stubble or two, after an hour we arrive at a farm, where a farm-hand warns us that the deer has run into a turnip-house and is shut in there safely. Nobody wants another hunt. The second deer, which is somewhere on the roads in the ever-following deer-cart, is not enlarged. The one in the turnip-house is picked up later by the cart, and we all ride to our homes as best we can.

Many and many a good hunt have I had with carted deer in Norfolk. The subscription was ten pounds a year; a horse cost little to keep; few followers were out – forty at the most – and there were no motor-cars. Often, after a long point of some fifteen or twenty miles, if we found ourselves near a town like

Diss or Harleston, a special train came from Norwich, consisting of enough horse-boxes and one passenger coach to take us all back, at the cost of seven and sixpence each! This is true, although almost unbelievable. At Swainsthorpe the train would stop, my steed was unloaded on to the platform and I led her the few yards up to Church Farm, where George would have gruel ready. Mrs Lodes then appeared at the door saying, 'Well, Mr Munnin's, you don't look as though you've bin in a ditch today!', and Joe would appear, jumping around in welcome, and I would go in to change. No bathroom! And I never missed it! A hip-bath was the thing.

Hunting became part of my life, and I saw many things on those days: bright winter sunlight on clipped horses and scarlet coats; on bare trees; stacks; on farmhouse gables; the riding out after a slight frost; the riding home with a frost beginning and a young moon in the sky; puddles already crisping over as I said good night to friends. Such were needed to freshen my mind and vision.

Here is another kind of day – I remember, it was in February I still wanted another water-colour to make up my six for the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours Exhibition. That morning, full of hope, I was going out hunting, but seeing the bright sun with early spring in the air, I resisted the urgent desire to go to the meet. Dashing up to my bedroom, I was soon into my old clothes, to the disappointment of George, who was always glad to send me on my way to a hunt.

'Get Rebecca saddled, George, and get out the scarlet coat and cap,' said I in haste.

Hurrying to the studio, I bustled around, gathering easel and water-colours, and marched out to the fray, to my 'hidden spot', where the scarlet wasn't seen from the road. George was ready to get up on to the glossy, clipped-out mare, each looking the part. I remember his pose – his right hand was resting on the rump of the mare as he turned, looking back, pretending to be a whipper-in calling to tail hounds.

Soon I had composed, started, and was well on the way to finishing the picture. It was bright, fresh, and looking well by one o'clock. After two o'clock I was out again, completing background, bare trees, fields and distance, as they appeared with the horse and rider. Between 3 and 4 pm I had finished with ease, and was full of a sense of satisfaction, with hands growing cold, as two friends on horseback came riding along a headland on an adjoining field.

'What sort of a day?' I called.

'Not too bad,' was the reply.

The result of this day's work was cheering to a poor painter dependent on the brush for his living. Behold, in the spring, on just such a bright morning, a dear old maiden lady, a neighbour, had looked in to ask me to supper with herself and bachelor brother. The letters had just come. I opened them. Two were from the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours, in one of which the Secretary informed me of the sale of three works. I shouted 'Hurrah!',

and so did the old maid. Then I opened the other one, and read the usual notice: 'Your drawing, number so and so, has been purchased by' – But what was this? – I looked and looked – 'Queen Alexandra.' Could such things be? I read and shouted it to the old lady, and rushed out to the stables to tell George, with Miss Irons – that was her name – rushing out, too. 'Seize my coat behind, or I'll go up in smoke!' I cried, and she seized my coat, holding on and crying, 'Whoa, Alfred!', as I called George, and went to take a look at the placid Rebecca as she gazed out of the door. She certainly had earned her keep for a while, for the picture had sold for the vast amount of twenty-five guineas!



*Mister Sponge, the raspers taking
Sets the junker's nerves a-shaking . . .*

XXIV

SHOOTING DAYS AND PARTIES

NORFOLK is a shooting county, and it would seem strange were I to leave out memories of jolly Pickwickian shooting-parties with friends. I never took to shooting. When living at home in the early days my brothers did all the shooting. Once only have I taken life with a gun. A poor little water-rat sat on the weeds amongst the bulrushes quietly nibbling some succulent end. I took a long and careful aim from a very short distance away, and blew it to bits. This was my first and only shot, excepting those with rifles at fairs!

I was often asked to join a set of friends who lived in and around Norwich. They made a syndicate and took a shoot. This syndicate generally consisted of the brothers Boswell, my friend Adcock, a prosperous business man or two, a fat lawyer, an auctioneer and a brewer. All these men were fond of life, and whatever they did, they did well. Those shoots were done well – almost too well – so that after lunch the shooting was sometimes a little wild.

One of the shoots that these jolly men had taken year after year lay south of Norwich, in the parishes of Bunwell and Ashwellthorpe. To give an idea how long ago all this happened, we drove out from Norwich to Bunwell in a roomy, closed-in wagonette, drawn by a pair of horses. One might imagine a third horse being necessary when the great luncheon-basket appeared and was placed in some recess under the driver's tall box-seat.

Awaiting our arrival were a keeper and odd men and boys to carry the game. The birds, if I recollect aright, were seldom driven; the party preferred to walk the stubbles and roots in line, with well-trained dogs working slightly ahead.

How often have I, as a man without a gun – a mere looker-on out for the day – walked through mangolds and swedes in line with my friends of the past. There hangs in a house at Southwold, in the possession of a colonel, an early canvas painted from memory the very next day after one of those shoots. It was done in the top room over Boswell's shop in London Street, Norwich. I can picture the scene now as I saw it, walking at the right-hand end of the line. A row of healthy-looking sportsmen in perspective, stalking a field of swedes, their dogs just ahead of them. This was a humorous painting – I made the most of the eighteen-stone lawyer who is the nearest man in the picture. Each figure in the receding row and each dog stalking ahead is a characteristic

portrait. Following in the rear are keeper's men and boys carrying pheasants, partridges, hares and rabbits. A Norfolk hedgerow, with hedgerow oaks, forms the horizon; the whole party is slowly advancing. A warm October sun lights up the scene, particularly the red jowl of the lawyer in the foreground!

Although a crude effort, this early painting had a truth about it, and each man recognized his own portrait and that of his dog; a great deal of fun was made of them. I was inspired by this particular scene following one of those bacchanalian lunches, when the contents of that basket – not only of food but of drink – had had its reddening effect on the countenance of the company. It was not the mellow light of the October sun alone that gave the glow!

I remember an occasion on one of the return journeys in the wagonette during an election period. We called at a large wayside inn on the Norwich turnpike, known as the King of Prussia. That evening the large tap-room was filled with rustic Radicals who needed guidance. One of our party – a gifted orator in his way – after having stood round after round, gave them a political specch. Here was a Rowlandson scene – flushed faces of stalwart sons of the soil, each wearing his own style of dress – this was in the days when men wore corduroys, sleeve-waistcoats, and coloured handkerchiefs round their necks. Their Norfolk faces tanned and coloured by the weather, they were men who knew the soil, who could handle a team, feed bullocks and look after a flock of sheep.

At last the speaker, leaving more rounds of drinks for those in the tap-room of the King of Prussia, was borne away, helped into the wagonette and so home.

I have said that these were Pickwickian parties. I do not know if any of those men are alive today, but I do know, and still remember, in spite of all the years between, some verses of a poem that I wrote about that shoot. I have no written copy whatever of these lines; the opening verses have escaped my memory, but this is how some of the verses went:

If only the birds had stayed on the land
Each man and each dog would have done well;
But this is just what they did not understand;
Those damned silly birds down in Bunwell.

The coveys were artful and each bird said
When somebody shouted 'Over',
'What I prefer to an ounce of lead
Is the next-door neighbour's clover.'

Sam Boswell's new dog, a useless brute called Spider, would dash off in front, scaring all the birds. He at last was put on a lead. In the following verse Sam addresses the dog:

Spider, I'll pick up a clod
And throw at your head, by God!
If you don't leave off running and be a bit cunning,
You stupid old, silly old s-d!

It gives me a queer feeling to sit here and write of those far-off days – sometimes it all seems like a dream. I must make another trip to my friend's house at Southwold to see that crude painting and assure myself that I really was once one of those who walked that field of swedes after the Pickwickian lunch at Bunwell.

XXV

ZENNOR

WE have read how Cézanne went on painting a plate of apples for weeks and months, and how he had over a hundred sittings for Vollard's portrait; the two mares, the grey and the brown, were my plates of apples. I once went on for weeks painting the grey against a grey stone wall on grey days. Ned was patient, so were those two blessed mares.

I will now tell of a move and campaign similar to those which I used to make in Norfolk. Zennor, on the north coast of Cornwall, not far from St Ives, was at that time a primitive and unspoilt village. Being in a granite country, where the soil was shallow, huge masses of stone were built into walls; every wall on each side of every lane consisted of huge slabs of split granite. Each farm was divided into small fields, and the stone which had been cleared from the ground was piled into walls, some being half as wide as a room. Great stones of strange shapes stood near the houses on either side of the brow of the hill where the road leads to St Ives. In fact, this was a most picturesque and primitive place. Having seen the village more than once whilst the hounds were drawing for a fox on Zennor Hill, and having visited it many times with friends, I was itching to get to the place and use Ned and the horses in fresh scenes. It happened like this: my paraphernalia was packed in the village wagonette and driven over to Zennor by Mr Jory, the complacent landlord of the Lamorna Inn, his old black mare, called Bess, between the shafts. Amongst this paraphernalia were the scarlet coat, black cap, white breeches and boots. Ned and I rode the mares across the moors, a matter of fourteen or fifteen miles.

A hefty, six-foot Cornish farmer, Mr Berryman, let me part of his stables as standing for the two models. This farmer was a good friend to me, and so were his two great sons. I had already ordered a ton of hay to be sent from the corn-dealer at Penzance; the farmer supplied me with oats, and the two mares were done well. I had arranged lodgings with a Mrs Griggs, and had her front parlour, whilst Ned had a bedroom, and fed in the kitchen with the landlady – all this for the vast sum of one guinea for myself and fifteen shillings a week for Ned! In those days, before motor traffic brought sightseers and countless

visitors to Cornwall, lodgings were cheap; farm butter and clotted cream were in abundance; no electric pylons or posts straddled the moors or lined the roads; no sounds of motor horns disturbed the villages; no great charabancs took up the whole of a narrow road, forcing unfortunate people to retire to some wider space or pull in a gateway whilst they sailed past. All was serenity and peace; a good cart-horse or two on every farm doing what work was needed, and yellow Jersey cows everywhere.

Repeating the same methods I always used on principle in my earlier Norfolk adventures, I at once started into work. The morning after our arrival, the humble Ned, to the surprise of Mrs Griggs, appeared in white cord breeches and top boots, and at about 9.30 am, riding Grey Tick, with a mackintosh to hide his scarlet coat, he came towards me up the hill where I was already planted with easel, canvas and box. This was a start. What could be better? Ned shed his mackintosh. I told him to ride a little way down the hill and then come slowly up again. 'Stop, stop, Ned! That's all right; keep where you are.' Then, with a twenty-four-by-twenty canvas as a feeler, I began to put down my composition. A loafer or two in the village below stood and stared, a boy or two appeared, and not long after the start a fellow came up.

'Oh!' said he, 'I thought the hounds were out.'

I said, 'It's quite all right; you can see what I'm doing - now run away and leave me to it.'

All these Cornish people were used to artists. It was the home of artists, and everybody understood their ways. Perhaps it was the artists who helped to popularize that end of Cornwall and brought increasing crowds to the West.

Here is the scene of the painting. A grey sky; a boulder-strewn hill, with flat spaces of grey granite showing amongst the heather-clad sides sloping down to the moor below. Beyond that undulating moors, fields and stone walls. Farther away, Guava Cairn, grey against the yet paler grey of the faint distant horizon beyond Morvah, and through all this the Land's End road curving away out of sight. Coming up the hill with hounds was Ned on the grey, the scarlet coat in low tones, the black velvet cap the darkest note of colour - a splendid subject.

Cheered by such a sight, I set the whole impression down before one o'clock. This was the only way to begin - no messing about. Get started. A good thing for Ned; a good thing for the horses; and a good thing for the painter himself.

For five weeks, from the last days of March to the beginning of May, Ned and I lodged with Mrs Griggs, and I worked, one thing leading to another, every day seeing more scenes to paint: grey rocks; brown heather; great sows lying in the mud at the end of the village street; little pigs, middle-sized pigs; fowls; bumptious cockerels with red combs on manure-heaps; cows; and stone walls. Alas! there is no time in life to paint everything. To succeed one must concentrate. Here were the horses and the man, and so, with the exception of one or two side-steppings of cows being milked in stone yards, I stuck to my horses and Ned in the landscape. This picture that I started out with became my principal picture of that visit. I tried various subjects. One so often seen

when a fox runs to the cliff – a grey sky, a grey sea and grey granite rocks; a mounted figure holding a horse silhouetted against the white band of surf below; the whipper-in waiting whilst the huntsman goes down the cliff for hounds which have followed the fox over the boulders to a sanctuary from where they will never get him out. I tried a huntsman riding in the valley below the hill, followed by the whole pack of hounds – a small figure in a vast landscape. Finally, I decided that my first impression would bear repeating on a larger scale. This picture, thirty-six by forty inches, painted on that same spot, of Ned riding up the hill with his hounds, was exhibited at the Academy the first year after the war, 1919, the year in which I was elected, and was bought by Connell of Bond Street, for what I thought was a huge sum – two hundred and fifty guineas. In 1945, when living at Withypool on Exmoor, I received a telegram from Colnaghi in Bond Street congratulating me on the sale of one of my pictures at an auction in Edinburgh for twelve hundred guineas. This was the picture painted at Zennor, and which had been bought originally for two hundred and fifty at the Academy in 1919.

Another picture, illustrated here, was of Ned on the grey at the top of Zennor Hill near a hoary pile of granite rocks, which those who know Zennor and the moors will easily recall if ever they read this. The picture was called 'An April Fox'. The whip is stationed at the top of the hill, from where he can see the country below, while lower down the hill are figures on foot, holding their hats in the air and pointing. The whip looks away into the country and the mare stands like a statue, her ears pricked. I worked looking into the April sunlight, which lit the back, loins and mane of the mare, surrounding Ned's coat with a flaming, scarlet light. Whilst in the making, this picture used to be left on the top of the hill, beneath a cavern of granite. The cool air hardened and dried the paint, and there being a spell of good weather at the time, damp only tightened the canvas and slightly warped that staunch stretcher made in St Ives. It was a perfect subject, which had to be done quickly, and was settled in about three mornings. I was learning a good motto: leave a picture alone and let it finish itself. This picture was also shown at the Academy in 1919 and purchased by Connell & Son of Bond Street. Two hundred guineas was the price.

Yet another picture of Ned on his grey was bought by the Newcastle Art Gallery. In this he is riding towards you, silhouetted up against the sky, and the leading hounds are coming out of the picture. Of the many reproductions made from my work, the one taken from the Newcastle picture is, I think, the most satisfactory.

This shows how those two animals paid for their keep. And Ned, who was then eighteen, was receiving good wages, a suit of clothes a year, and was happy, well-fed and comfortable. I paid for his lodgings and beer, and with the pound at its value of that day, he was not badly off.

There were many other sketches and studies made at Zennor, one with Ned on the grey mare against the sky, not in the scarlet coat but with bare arms and

shirt sleeves, and riding bare-back at a fair. This was bought later for a Gallery in Australia; and after the war I finished a much larger version, begun at Zennor, called 'The Grey Horse'. This sold in the Academy for nine hundred guineas whilst I was in America in 1922. Good, patient Grey Tick! I have often thought of her since, and how she helped my account at the bank.

Speaking of business matters, a certain dealer in Glasgow used occasionally to write asking me to send him any works I had for sale. My favourite-sized canvas was twenty-four by twenty inches, and one of the reasons for this was that two canvases could be packed face to face, with pins in between, and flat boards on the outside. These were sent by registered parcel post, their full weight being under eleven pounds. Whenever I sent him the canvases, a cheque for fifty pounds always came back – twenty-five for each picture. This sounds a small sum today, but I was glad of the money. Being a member of the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours, my six works sent there each year were sold, not for startling sums, but the prices were welcome enough at the time, and my work shown at the autumn Glasgow Exhibitions generally found a buyer. Thus I was well able to afford to keep models and go hunting on them at the same time.

More memories of Zennor: a friend of mine, Leonard Jennings, a sculptor, who afterwards joined up with the Northumberland Hussars in the war and finally was on the staff of General Rawlinson, came down to stay with me. He was a good soul, a good horseman and a light weight, and during his stay he and I had many a ride over the moors when there was a thick fog and it was impossible to work. Great piled-up slabs of rock, lying one upon another, looking like prehistoric animals, stood out from the weather-beaten surfaces of that hill-top, taking fantastic shapes in the enveloping fog, whilst from below we heard the oft-repeated wailing sound of fog-horns from steamers finding their way along the coast. Across that strange, undulating country, to the sound of fog-horns, we chatted and rode, and on one occasion we came to a pole hung across the track from wall to wall down a drift-way between two rough enclosures. The pole may have been only about four feet high. I rode the brown mare at it, but she refused: again I tried unsuccessfully, and Jennings trotted up on Grey Tick. She made a perfect leap. After a great deal of trouble my brute followed, hitting the pole with all four feet, I landing on her neck. That night in our cosy parlour we drank to the grey in hot gin hollands and lemon, and talked of Jennings' leap until past midnight.

I must relate one more incident. On a late afternoon he and I were riding along near the edge of the tall cliffs west of Zennor, when we saw a rare thing for those days – a waiting motor-car. Coming up the track from below, out of 'the roar of the sea' as one might say, was an artist, with a chauffeur behind him helping him to carry his things. I ventured to have a word with him, and discovered that he was the famous American marine painter, Dogherty. It was a strange coincidence that I should meet this much-talked-of man, then staying at the hotel at St Ives, who was painting the rocks and the surf of the

Cornish coast. Long afterwards, when in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, I stood in front of one of those very pictures of the Cornish coast by Dogherty. No wonder it was hanging in this honoured position. It was one of the best representations of boiling white surf around rocks, making patterns of jade-greens and grey, that one could ever wish to see. Such a picture could only have been done on the spot, even within reach of the spray. Dogherty was a strongly built fellow, and watching them come up the cliff one felt that he loved the sea and had the genius and the physical strength to contend with the situation hundreds of feet below on the wet rock where he had planted his easel. There was something about this picture in the Metropolitan which could never have been achieved within the four walls of any studio. Nature had been his inspiration – he had a swift, sure hand and the seeing eye.

After the painting spell at Zennor, sad to relate – not being possessed in those days with the mad affection for horses that I have today – poor Grey Tick was delivered back to the farmer from whence she came, and I never saw her again.

Probably one of the best and most profitable deals I ever made in my life was when I bought a cow as a model for fourteen pounds. She was a cross between a Friesian cow and a Jersey bull, with the usual white marking on the forehead, a black neck, and her shoulder shot with dun colour. Behind her shoulder was a broad band of white, and a large pattern of black and dun, with more white on her quarters; a most perfect model to paint, after Mr Jory – the complacent, comfortable landlord of the Lamorna Inn – had trained her to lead on a halter. I can see the stout Jory now, the cow at one end of a long line and he at the other. The cow was carcering, head down, through the orchard behind the inn, whilst he threw his sturdy weight against hers, quickly passing the line round an apple-tree, so as to bring the cow to a standstill. Finding that she was mastered and that Jory had a sieve of bran, oats and chaff, she became docile to the halter in the course of an hour or so.

My landlord at that time, a combined farmer and miller, was a Mr Hoskins, a tall, thin man, with a black beard, wearing a half top hat, rather in the style that has become famous through being worn by Mr Churchill.¹ He was slightly lame, and walked with a stick, and played the harmonium at the village chapel. We both came to the agreement that he should allow the cow to be one of his herd, and that he should have the milk and the calves, whilst I could have her at any time and moment as a model.

To my mind, a cow, although perhaps not so romantic and beautiful an animal as the horse, is a better subject for the artist. This cow became friends with Mr Hoskins' cows. She could be led, with one or two following, down to the stream or wherever I was painting her. There they would group themselves and stand quietly, peacefully chewing their cuds for hours. A pleasant way of life, painting to the sweet music of water running over stones and pebbles; the high sunlight piercing the foliage, flashing on leaf and stalk –

¹ Now, of course, Sir Winston.

throwing pools of light on transparent, rippling, sandy shallows. What colour there was in the running water, the reflections, the sunlit ripples; what subtle blue passages in the shadowed current! I see myself with a thirty-by-twenty-five-inch canvas – a beautiful canvas from Lanham's with a surface on which any artist would have loved to paint – working away at the two contented cows standing placidly in the stream.

With the subject in front of me, I was happiest, and here, undisturbed in a quiet valley, I painted quick impressions of cows and stream, finally settling down to a longer exercise in paint on a fifty-by-forty-inch canvas. My picture was the black-and-white cow on the bank above me, silhouetted against strong sunlight streaming through the foliage behind; whilst near her hind feet lay her little calf, helping to make the composition. Great curving trunks of sycamore-trees going up and out of the picture were the first incentives to my design. Painted on another of Lanham's canvases, this time with an absorbent, china-clay priming, it was exhibited at the famous long-dead International Exhibition in the Grosvenor Gallery in Bond Street, and was bought by Colonel James Woods, of Ottawa, Canada. During my visit to that country I saw it in his house, looking bright and fresh as the day it was painted – a tribute to the china-clay canvases prepared in those days at St Ives.



A sketch done in Cornwall

XXVI

HAMPSHIRE HOP-PICKERS

OF all my painting experiences, none were so alluring and colourful as those visits spent amongst the gipsy hop-pickers in Hampshire each September. More glamour and excitement were packed into those six weeks than a painter could well contend with. I still have visions of brown faces, black hair, ear-rings, black hats and black skirts; of lithe figures of women and children, of men with lurcher dogs and horses of all kinds. I still recall the never-ceasing din around their fires as the sun went down, with blue smoke curling up amongst the trees. I think of crowded days of work – too swiftly gone. Yet, with the end of the picking and departure of the gipsies, I felt considerable relief as the last sounds of their wheels died away. These folk with importunate ways and wild habits were well enough for a time, but for no longer.

The first of those Hampshire episodes came about through a friendship with a clever woman artist, a comparatively rich lady, with a good income. This wealth did not prevent her from working strenuously at her art. Trained in the earlier days of the Orpen and John School in Chelsea, she was, I would say, one of the few people possessing the great gift to draw, and this gift she perfected in that school. She could draw anything. A wizard with the pencil – not only could she draw – she was a fine etcher, and for years was a regular exhibitor at the New English Art Club when that Club was in its best days. She was, in the quietest way imaginable, a true and generous Bohemian, and helped many people. Her London home contained a printing-press, and all the paraphernalia which goes with etching; her country home was somewhere in Hampshire. As the years went on, she became a luxurious rambler. With a magnificent, carved and gilded caravan, drawn by two well-fed horses, and with and able attendant, she travelled about, and once followed a circus through Ireland, making a number of original drawings and etchings. It was in 1913 that I visited her at a farm near Evesham. I remember the brightly painted caravan standing in the stackyard at the farm, and the two horses grazing on a pasture.

Every year the caravan was taken to Hampshire, and for a month or six weeks she worked at a place called Binsted amongst a host of hop-picking

gipsies. Hop-picking usually started the last week in August or first week in September, and went on for more than a month, well into October.

My friend was going to travel down with her van and horses, over the Cotswolds, into Hampshire. I walked through part of the Cotswolds, whilst the van did somewhere about twenty miles a day. A long hill up to Chipping Campden almost defeated those two good horses pulling the caravan. With several stops it arrived in the town. A trace-horse was needed. My friend's driver had remarked on the good looks of a fine grey horse in a pasture, and on asking where a horse could be bought, he was told of a farm we had passed. Walking back, he found it was where he had seen the grey, and it was bought and paid for on the spot. Trace-gear was found at the saddler's, and next morning a start was made in style. No hill was too much for that triple team.

At Alton I took up my quarters at the Swan Hotel, meeting my friend at her inn outside the town on the Portsmouth road.

Now for the gipsies. The first morning a dark man, wearing ear-rings, a coloured scarf, a black felt hat, sleeved-waistcoat and tight trousers, drove up to the inn in a typical yellow-wheeled gipsy cart. Between the shafts was a strong young horse, with long, thick tail and mane; the horse was almost covered with brass-mounted harness. The man was one of the lady artist's friends and models, Mark Stevens. He told us the hop-picking would start that week and, addressing my friend as 'my lady', suggested he should drive us to Binsted to see the camp. We were soon in the cart, driving along the Portsmouth road, where, by the Hen and Chickens at Froyle, we turned, right-handed, over a small stream, finally arriving in a forty-acre pasture, with a fine oak-tree in the middle. Standing along the hedges on each side were caravans of all shapes, sizes and descriptions: round, romany, bee-hive tents; old army bell-tents. There were at least two to three hundred souls, men, women and children – not including dogs and horses – camped in this pasture. Circular patches of white wood ash were on the ground in front of each dwelling – tent or caravan – and at that moment we saw, travelling slowly round the meadow, a large farm wagon, loaded high with faggots, drawn by two cart-horses. From the top of this load a man with a fork was throwing down faggots, one by one, as the wagon passed each family. This the farmer did daily, to save the breaking of his fences and trees – hop-picking folk must have firewood!

Lurchers and greyhounds lay underneath many a vehicle, travelling families of fowls were making themselves at home around the fences, and smoke from wood fires, shouts of fighting children, and barking of dogs filled the air.

Near the oak-tree in the middle of the field stood a capacious mission tent, the presence of which did not seem to have any check on the language used by men, women and children.

'I'll pull yer little lights out an' show 'em to yer!' yelled a mother to an enraged and screaming child with a dirty face.

Horses which had never been turned off together before were making friends

or having kicking matches between themselves. This added to the din, for those travelling horses belonging to the gipsies could scream louder than any woman!

'Look at that something something 'orse over there; 'e'll be a-killin' that b—— pony!'

'Garn,' was the reply.

Here was a fresh scene which an East Anglian would not see in Cornwall and probably not even in Kent, for these pickers mostly travelled up from Bristol and West Dorsetshire, Salisbury Plain and Herefordshire. The greater part of them were either true or very near Romany – with names like Gray, Lee, Stevens, Gregory, Loveday.

Seeing this swarming crowd of humanity and knowing that with introductions from 'the Lady' I should soon find all the models I needed, I made arrangements to get my painting-things over on the following day. Standing by the stream which we had crossed before reaching the meadow was an old, thatched, disused paper-mill, adjoining a row of cottages, and there I arranged to keep canvases and materials, which, as usual, were punctually arriving from St Ives.

I was painting these 'gippos', as I called them, right to the end of the hop-picking. Never in my life have I been so filled with a desire to work as I was then. The families that I got to know had picturesque children, dogs and horses. The women had, somewhere in the back of each caravan, great black hats with ostrich feathers, laid away for gala days, or to be worn when selling baskets or brushes on the road. Nobody could beat their style of dress, with black silk apron over a full-pleated skirt, a pink or mauve blouse showing off a tough, lithe figure; strings of red beads, and wonderful ear-rings glinting under blue-black hair, came into their make-up, and sure enough, if I needed it, the large black hat – complete with ostrich feathers – was produced and worn.

Mrs Loveday was one of the most dressy of the women, and liked being painted. It was better to paint amongst a certain set of families who, in some way or other, were related.

'Who d'ye want ter-morrer, Mr Money?' Mark Stevens would ask. 'D'ye want Mrs Stevens, or the kids, or d'ye want Reuben, or will ye be wantin' a 'orse?'

So each evening, before washing my brushes and leaving, I had to settle in my mind which ones I was painting the next day. These I paid at the same rate as they made at hop-picking, which I believe was then about ten shillings a day. Speaking of washing brushes, it must have been for at least five weeks that I washed my brushes every afternoon, excepting Sundays, in the stream that ran under that old, disused paper-mill.

My largest canvases that year were forty by thirty-six inches. One painted amongst the hops; the other, entitled 'The Departure of the Hop-pickers', is now in the Art Gallery of Melbourne, Australia.

Mrs Loveday posed in all her finery for this picture, holding a black horse.

In the centre Mark Stevens was harnessing a white horse to a blue, Romany-looking, ship-shaped caravan. Children and dogs were in the foreground. The picture had a large proportion of sky, with light, passing clouds, and was done in three consecutive mornings. All through September mellow days followed on in succession with much the same beautiful effect. The September sun never reaches anywhere near the zenith, but travels round at a lower angle, giving the long light an artist loves; a light casting long shadows which combine and help the composition. What days! What models!

The original version of 'The Departure of the Hop-pickers' was brought up to my first London studio after the war, where I sold it to a collector. He bought four others and, being a business man, not long afterwards accepted an offer from a Bond Street dealer for double what he had given me. The picture 'The Departure of the Hop-pickers' had cost him two hundred and fifty pounds. Doubling this, the dealer gave him five hundred, and sold it to the Melbourne Art Gallery for fifteen hundred. I made two-fifty, my patron the same and the dealer a thousand!

A much larger version of the picture, done afterwards in tempera on a white russian canvas, was hung at the Academy in 1914, and was bought by the art critic, Konody, for a gallery in Japan. I considered this an honour, for Konody knew a picture.

On the advice of my artist friend, at the end of the picking I stayed on to see the actual and real 'departure of the hop-pickers'. This might be described as a classic sight. It was indeed! One after another, large and small, rolling, creaking caravans, with their straining, pulling horses, came out of that meadow, turned sharp to left or right, and went on their way. It was a morning of men shouting at horses, and an incessant rumbling away in the distance. Like a ship at sea, a caravan came pitching over the uneven ground, the father leading the horse, the wife leaning out of the half-doors, holding the reins; children's faces looking over the door, some youngsters sitting on the shafts, others running behind. Poultry slung in large crates or cages between the back wheels. Heavily laden, lurching in the wake of others, and joining in the procession, taking the westward route, all caravans and carts cleared the meadow that day. Many had been leaving, but this final exodus left the scarred, wide pasture empty – silent as the grave. There was nothing left to work for. I packed up my pictures in the old paper-mill and the next morning took them all to Alton station in a four-wheeled cab, and travelled back to Cornwall.

XXVII

THE HOUSE OF MY DREAMS

I NOW come to what I consider was the main event of my life. A married man should say that meeting his wife was the main event, but what is the use of meeting a wife if you have no house? Everyone must have a home, be he married or single. Here is the story of Castle House, Dedham.

For some weeks I had been receiving particulars of this house or that, somewhere on the Suffolk border, where there was a river. At that time, a new friend – a Mr Crittall, of steel-window fame – had come into the picture. It was he who owned my water-colour of 'The Piper', and had bought other paintings from me. I had given him advice as to who should paint portraits of himself and his wife; for the husband I recommended John, for the wife Charles Sims. In return for this, I received many kindnesses from him; he even extended his hospitality to some Chelsea Arts Club friends, and asked them to spend long week-ends with him at Chelmsford, and was our guide on antiquarian church-seeing journeys. We took with us in his large car cold luncheons, bottles of wine and cigars; we chattered in chancels; we examined old gravestones; we called at old inns; we could never have enough of that country we travelled through; we called the journeys 'Crittall's tours'.

On one of these week-ends it was settled that he should take myself and three other artist friends into the Suffolk border district, bearing with us printed particulars of the various houses which I wanted to look at and which we could inspect – it was not a long list. The first, second and third were 'delusions' – before the car stopped we saw that it was a waste of time to look at them. 'Get on,' said our host to the chauffeur. But at Dedham it was a different matter; at our first stop there we saw a house with meadows and grounds actually bordering the river itself; but alas! this had been sold only a short while previously.

So on we went, through the beautiful street of Dedham, where we stopped and looked at its great church, and where, if memory serves me right, we took refreshment at the Sun Hotel. We inquired the way to Castle House, and another half a mile saw us at a white gate, overhung with trees. The front-seat artist was already out, and had flung open the heavy, ornamental, Victorian

barrier. The car rolled in, and there on the lawn we spread the lunch. But we had forgotten to call for the keys at the village. This, however, was no hindrance; before the lunch was set on the lawn, before the bottles were even out, we could hear shouts from the windows; two of the Chelsea Arts Club men had already found the conservatory glass door unfastened, and, walking through the door of the garden-room, were very soon overrunning the house. All in a tremble, I followed; Mr Crittall followed. What a place to live in! From the cellar below one of them cried, 'Come down here! Come and have a look at this! Come and look at these arches and bins!' Another was up in the bedrooms: 'Come up here! Come and look at the bathroom! Come and look at the bedrooms!' I was riveted in the drawing-room, with its Regency bow windows looking out across peaceful paddocks with chestnut-trees and cows grazing. At the sight of all this I was losing courage; the responsibility of such a place was beyond me, who had never possessed a house of any kind, not even a cottage! The dining-room was all I could have wished for – Regency windows, one looking out over a laurel fence far across the valley to East Bergholt, the other looking on to the lawn and meadows. On the left was a wellingtonia-tree; an old copper-beech, limes and a large plane-tree, with drooping boughs, under which lunch was spread and waiting.

Dear, dependable Mr Crittall gave me more confidence. 'Well,' said he, 'what do you think of it?'

'Magnificent,' said the others, coming into the room.

Still full of fears, I began to wish I had never thought of buying such a thing as a gentleman's residence. I should never be able to keep up such a place! Who was I? A mere painter. I was no retired general or colonel. Such men could play with a house like this, whilst I . . . what could I do with it?

'What about lunch?' said our guide and benefactor, and out we went.

I see ourselves now, sitting round that lunch spread on the lawn under the plane-tree; the day was beautiful; so was the food; so was the wine.

All were persuading me to pull myself together and buy the place. With food and drink I may have gained courage, and after much talk we inspected the coach-house, cow-house, stables, dairy, servants' hall, courtyard, walled kitchen garden and paddocks. For all that, I still felt I should never have thought of tying myself up with the responsibilities of a home in the country.

In the end we sent the chauffeur down to fetch the builder who had possession of the keys and knew the price. He arrived simultaneously with the groom who had been employed by the former owner of the house. We were told that since the death of Colonel Fellowes, its late occupant, the place had been occupied by officers during the last year of the war. Mr Crittall, a man of business, had found out from the builder that the price was two thousand pounds. Bearing in mind the big cheque I had received from the Connell brothers, and also remembering the various commissions which had been coming in, my spirits, at the sound of that figure, began to rise; suddenly seized by an unaccountably reckless mood, I said, 'I'll have it.'

Mr Crittall said, 'No, no. Wait! My lawyer lives in Colchester – we'll tell him to make a firm offer of one thousand, seven hundred and fifty, and then see what happens.'

This was agreed to, and after a last lingering look at the meadows and the peaceful cows, we left for Chelmsford, where the same evening we had a jolly party, and later on were singing:

Hark away, hark away, let's be jolly and gay,
And drink to the joys of the next hunting day.

We certainly had been hunting, but for a house. With the quiet, non-tarmaced, well-tree-ed road leading up to it, and the country all about looking as it did at that time, thirty-one years ago, I had indeed found my dream house, river and all.

Readers will understand with what a sinking feeling I thought about this property; it was a big house for one man. There were seven bedrooms, a first and comfortable entrance hall leading into a larger and loftier one with a good staircase and a Georgian fanlight at the top; a north room, or library as we now call it; a large dining-room; a larger drawing-room; and finally, a delightful circular Adam-looking room, with a domed ceiling, leading into the garden. The big, sunny, whitewashed kitchen, looking out on to a court with an old fig-tree on the wall, was perhaps the best of all. Through the kitchen was yet another roomy apartment that had been used as a servants' hall, leading to others beyond. There were two cellars – one underground and one above – a larder, butler's pantry, store-rooms, and a large bathroom – a new luxury for me.

Time waits for no man. I got a reply from the agents saying the lowest price was one thousand eight hundred pounds. With Mr Crittall's assurance that this was no price at all, I bought the house, not knowing then that just down the lane were a pair of large cottages, erected in 1914 by an excellent builder, which went with the property.

But I had another severe shaking when I took a friend to look quietly at Castle House, and to meet the groom and gardener; they were then getting thirty shillings a week living rent free as neighbours in my two cottages. I decided to keep both these men. The groom, a Sam Weller type, was a man in his forties, with a wife and two boys; he assured me that, if I liked, they would bring up their furniture and possessions and live in the house. 'The missus 'il cook and do for ye,' said he. Mrs Garrett had the face of a saint, and all was settled that they should come in the house, take charge and look after me.

The next move was to get my belongings from Swainsthorpe, including the sectional studio. Kind Mr Crittall sent a special van to bring all the studio effects and pictures; my furniture arrived in a pantechmicon when I was away painting at Windsor, or somewhere. The time had come for me to take up residence. With my first guest – the sculptor friend who had stood playing the violin in fancy dress in the Chelsea Arts Ball picture – I arrived, and found the

Garretts had placed all the furniture in practically the same position as it is standing today! This really was very clever, and on looking at Garrett's intelligent countenance, I began to think that I had fallen on my feet, and it looked as though I might be well served.

But still, for all that, during the week-end I tramped up and down the rooms, cursing my folly for having saddled myself with such a responsibility. I began to wish that I had never seen the house, and believed that I should never paint again, under the weight of my possession.

Later, I sent the builder to examine the empty studio at Swainsthorpe, and arranged for it to be taken down and brought to Dedham by rail. I had chosen the place where it was to be erected, on a new brick pinning, and on my next visit there stood the studio, with an extra length which had been added by this capable builder.

From then on, things took shape; and the very first job I did in that newly moved studio was a model, in clay, of Edward Horner on his charger. This had been commissioned, through Sir Edwin Lutyens, for Lady Horner, the mother of that young man who had been killed in the war. The model of horse and rider was a good size, the horse being about the height of a deer. The bronze statue was to stand in a chapel in Mells church. My young sculptor friend, Waters, came and stayed as an assistant in setting up the armature, and finally with the casting of the plaster moulds. This first job in my home proved how right it is to get down to work. As it progressed I became reconciled to my new possession.

The story of the purchase of Castle House would not be complete unless I relate the arrival of the stud from Cornwall. Recalling this incident brings back to my mind how a capable lady friend, whom I had known in the Remounts, collected the horses in St Erth, boxed them, and travelled with them from west to east to Ardleigh station. The large sums I had paid through long years for their keep only heightened the pleasure of seeing the family arrive: the grey mare, her two daughters and Patrick, all looking well. Before long I became so used to seeing them grazing in the paddocks that it was difficult to persuade myself that we had not been in residence for years.

What advantages were mine then and for years onwards! Besides my own pastures, I hired twenty-six acres by the river. Having a large, open shed, this was a Garden of Eden for horses and cattle. I gave all my grazing to a friend who farmed two thousand acres near by, and in return he allowed me to ride where I liked on his land. On a winter afternoon at three or four o'clock I would get on a horse, and soon be galloping around forty-acre stubbles. On Sunday mornings my stud-groom and I used to school young horses there; a kingdom of heaven for me. All has altered. A few years ago the farms were sold for smallholdings. That excellent land that had once grown corn, cattle and sheep, now produces plums, apples, mushrooms, forced lettuces, black currants, strawberries and blackberries which grow sweeter wild.

The nearest blacksmith today lives four and a half miles away. There were two blacksmiths in Dedham when I bought Castle House.

My first ride out of Castle House stables was on Patrick, grown into a very useful horse. My thoughts went back to Swainsthorpe . . . and Mrs Lodes . . . when I used to ride out on a hunting morning – ‘an amazin’ man’. . . . Now I was really somebody. An owner of a house, land, cottages, horses! again after many years, I was even more ‘an amazin’ man’!! But there was always the grim thought – the reminder that pride goeth before a fall!



1940. Study of my wife on her old mare Cheena. I note that I have called it ‘The General’ – which means that she was in command

XXVIII

PAINTING THE GRAND NATIONAL WINNER, POETHLYN

THIS is a warm day in early May. Again the garden invites me. Yesterday I went out on a horse from 10 am until 5 pm. We dawdled along until we reached my far-off, grass lane. There I dismounted to sit in the sun and think how I should again take up my writing, long laid aside. Why be particular to a point? said my inner self. Only across the short space of our lives do we remember – and then, how much? . . . Minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years are a closed book . . . a few scenes and events remain in memory, clear and vivid. . . .

Having eaten cold boiled bacon and a crust of bread, I sat sunning myself, lost in thought. The horse then interrupted a train of memories. My own meagre lunch finished, he was making his – his, which was all around him. He had brought me fifteen miles, and was hungry – he is always hungry. A horse is a wonderful animal, I thought. Sitting below him, looking up at the unaccustomed view, he looks even more wonderful. Having carried me for half a day to that secluded lane, he makes his meal there – now from the hedge, now from the bank or the grassy track. He goes on eating all about him as far as the rein will allow, and then at the length of the crop tied to the rein, still giving me no peace for thought.

'Stop eating and let me think!' I exclaim.

He then snorts and blows his nostrils in my face. At last, having eaten all within reach, his head droops and he dozes. My fancy is at last free. What was I doing twenty years ago? thirty years ago? The horse certainly is a wonderful animal! said my inner self. As I gazed at my sleeping companion, the expression, 'wonderful animal', reminded me that I always murmured this to myself at a steeplechase meeting: . . . and more so now, with the present style of fast riding, when I see big, full-grown horses – over sixteen hands – fine jumpers, being hustled and rushed over jumps in a three-and-a-half-mile chase at a pace which is far too fast to allow them to do their best.

Each time I saw the National from the inside of Becher's Brook, or at Valentine's, or at the Chair Jump, I said to myself, 'The horse is a wonderful

animal – an abused animal. The horse is one of the greater miracles of nature.' Recurring reflections came and went in a brief second. The former question of what I was doing, not thirty, but thirty-one years ago – perhaps at that very moment – was still unanswered. In all probability I was sitting, either in the park or in the old stable yard of Brynypys, in Flintshire, painting Poethlyn, the Grand National winner of 1919. I will for a moment imagine myself back in the spring of 1919. Before that, being often in residence in Glebe Place, alone in my glory, to do as I pleased – meetings at Sandown, Kempton, Gatwick, Lingfield, drew me away from London. Horses were being saddled there, action was there. Steaming in the cold winter afternoon, a developed, clipped-out athlete of a horse was led into the winners' enclosure, or unplaced horses stood steaming near by in groups, with quivering tails, being unsaddled. How fortunate was I, being free and able to go as I pleased, from Victoria or Waterloo to these meetings, and fill my eye with such sights. Thus I saw many horses of that year which were to run in the National, Poethlyn included. In some miraculous way my race-cards of 1919 and 1920 are, with scores of others, still in the drawers of that walnut bureau from Bungay. Here are some, sorted out to assist my memory.

A pink coloured card of Sandown Park; February meeting, 1919. First day, Thursday, 27th February. In the fourth race – the February Handicap Steeplechase of a hundred sovereigns – is No. 1, Poethlyn – a – 13.8, Yellow, dark blue belt and cap. Wavertree – a fine black horse; Vermouth – a wiry pale bay, with curious pale eyes; Ally Sloper – a big bay. Poethlyn may not have run in those meetings, but on a Hurst Park card, where the meeting was held at Gatwick, he is top weight again, 12.7, in the trial Double Handicap Steeplechase (first class), with the same list of horses below.

Things were easier thirty-one years ago for those who went to Aintree. A far lesser crowd, and race-goers were allowed out of the paddock and enclosures on to the course and walked to see the jumps. I have little recollection of the train journey to and from Liverpool – but here indeed is a well-remembered scene. The horses coming over the formidable Chair Jump the first time round, and at last, after another round, the final struggle of those who had not fallen, with Poethlyn, the winner, ridden by Piggott. I remember rushing back to the paddock, seeing the horse led in by Mrs Peel, little dreaming I was to meet her or paint the horse in the near future. Following on the horse's heels I saw Piggott unsaddle him – a large dark bay, almost a brown, sweating, with nostrils distended, but showing no distress. The jockey's yellow jacket with black sash had worked out of his bespattered breeches behind, and hung loose. His face showed signs of the journey, and was flecked with mud. I see Mrs Peel now leading the horse, wearing a small black hat and long fur coat. Poethlyn had won a war National, and this was his Aintree Grand National; he carried twelve stone seven.

Weeks later, when the chestnut-trees in the park were in bloom, I was at the Flintshire home of the Peels – painting the horse and the family too. This was

thirty years ago. I see a stone balustrade on a terrace, stone gateposts, an iron-work gate and steps into the park; a glade of ancient oaks and the river Dee flowing below. A study of the horse painted in the stable yard still hangs here in my library; and what a stable yard and stables! Old Georgian boxes and stalls with names of horses over the mangers. When my studies of Poethlyn were finished he was put out in a strongly railed paddock. The stud-groom and another man took him there. In the quietest manner possible he was led into the enclosure – there was suppressed anxiety as to what he would do when loose. I was soon to see what a big fit horse could look like when free, and what acrobatic tricks he could perform. When loose, he stood like a statue for one moment; then he did all that a horse can do. He became an enlarged pony. He bounded his own height, he reared; he careered around the paddock, turning like a flash, showing magnificent action. The stud-groom and attendant stood transfixed. But – as he remarked after the horse had settled and had a good roll or two on the grass, 'That's a blessing; I thought he would do himself harm, but a horse like that has sense and balance.'

This, for instance, is one of the vivid memories of a lifetime which stands out and is worth recording. The *glorious morning*; sunlight on trees and grass; the flash of the horse's heels as he bounded in the air again and again; the anxious men watching. Like a statue the horse stood, head and tail in air. Then three, loud, ear-splitting snorts; more acrobatics to show us again what a horse could really do. Then he turned round and round and lay down and rolled and rolled in sheer joy.

My last sight of Poethlyn was in the pouring rain at Aintree in the following year, when Troytown won. With other horses, he had fallen at the first fence, and there they stood, a forlorn group, their jockeys soaked to the skin, waiting to go into the gate of the paddock. Such are the hazards of the great race.

Today we are seeing the young Lester Piggott, riding and winning races on the flat – grandson of Ernest.

XXIX

VARNISHING DAYS AT THE ACADEMY

To refresh my memory, I glance at the list of my Academy pictures for 1920 – the first year I showed six pictures, this being the number associates and members may send in.

The Academy bestows great benefits upon its members, who, as the years pass, are apt to grow indifferent to the position which A.R.A. or R.A. after their name gives them. To begin with, becoming an associate entitles a man to six pictures on the line – providing they are worthy of that distinction. How often the works of members are worthy is a question. Mine have seldom deserved the place given them. Sometimes a picture may be made to look sickly by those surrounding it. Again, whose work can stand up to the lighting in the large galleries? We see our masterpieces in the studio . . . they go to the Academy. . . . Varnishing Day arrives, bringing with it disillusion and disappointment. Quieter lighting at the galleries might ease the shock as wine at lunch restores our courage. However bad an artist, his work is his life; the worse it is the greater his vanity. The first sight of his efforts on the walls in the company of others brings all aspirations and hopes, with a deadly, sinking feeling, to the very floor he stands on. Hopes are fled. 'All is vanity and vexation of spirit' – and people think painting is easy! The easier it is to a man, the worse is his work.

When I began sending to the Academy there were outstanding pictures by fine artists which staggered the rest of us. In 1920 it was much the same. On that particular Varnishing Day, at sight of my own misdeeds, black despair and bitter disappointment laid hold on me. What artist can describe his feelings as he wanders from room to room, receiving blow after blow, discovering his own works in turn, his soul growing drearier and his mind a blank – oblivious to the more optimistic, kindly men who greet him on his round? What a chance on these walls for a man to attain fame and success. Yet, what happens? His work is dead. And why? Something lacking is the reason. Steadfastness – application – inspiration. Much nonsense has been written about genius. A genius is a worker who sacrifices all to his art. A craftsman is a better artist than a messer, a draughtsman better than a juggler; but, to my story.

On the three Varnishing Days for members a cold lunch is served in the large restaurant downstairs. It was a swell affair in 1920, even after a war. My pen flows faster at the thought of all the good food. What salmon! Cold pies and saddle of mutton, roast and boiled beef! The company was merry. Artists were still in good homes, living in some sort of comfort, and not beaten by a senseless, witless income tax which kills great and small alike – whoever or whatever they may be. Lunch ended; with the port, new associates were toasted, and had to respond. Afterwards, in the galleries, the pictures perhaps looked less bad. Each year did I resolve not to let another year slip – to do better.

What a succession of memories begins when I look at the titles of my six works in the 1920 list. 'Epsom Downs, City and Suburban Day', hung in the first room in a good place and bought by the Chantrey Bequest for seven hundred and fifty pounds. What does it recall now, that Epsom spring meeting? My first City and Suburban, and Great Metropolitan – good names for races! All was fresh and new. Since then I have long had the privilege of being a member of Epsom. Never have I quite felt the alluring, infectious joy of the races, the tradition of Epsom, as I did in that first year after the war, 1919. The hill, the crowd on either side of the course; the gipsies, the caravans were Edwardian – Victorian – eighteenth century. For me Epsom expresses the true meaning of the words 'The Races'.

Wandering amongst the caravans on the Downs beyond the stands, I heard a youth call:

'Hi, Mister Munnings!'

There was the boy, Gregory – grown into a youth – and his small brother. Before the war I used them as models in Hampshire amongst the hop-pickers. 'Come along wiv us to the wagon.'

They led me to a domain on the hill – to a select family that I had known at Binstead and Froyle before the war. A picturesque swarthy crowd, still retaining their carved-and-gilded caravans. The costumes of the women surpassed all dreams. Nothing was too fine for the City and Suburban. Large, black, ostrich-plumed hats, black ringlets, big ear-rings. Soon I was surrounded.

'Are ye comin' down, sir, for this "pickin' "'? I got a grand white mare for ye to paint.'

We went to a big tent, where I stood them quarts of beer.

'Are ye comin' to the Derby, Mr Money? We'll all be there.'

I was at the Derby, and saw Grand Parade – a black horse – ridden by Templeman, win. I saw all the gippos again; had tea with them, and carried a flea or two away with me. The picture of Epsom Downs which I stood looking at on Varnishing Day, 1920, was painted during a second visit to that same Hampshire hop-picking country where I had worked before the war. Nothing had changed. The same life on the same meadow. The same folk and caravans; with horses and dogs, chickens and children. The picture was begun and finished under stress and trial, in a wet season. Those who hope to bask in

September sunshine forget the Equinox. Looking at the picture on the wall of the first room, I trembled to think what those who sat as models would say had they known the amount I received for it.

Also in the first room was the portrait of the Earl of Athlone. Maybe it was the lunch; it actually looked well – a better picture than I thought it was, the reason being: Lord Athlone sat out of doors on a very quiet horse in beautiful weather, giving me long sittings after lunch until tea-time. He posed so well that the portrait was soon done. I remember him singing as he sat there, 'Rat-a-plan, Rat-a-plan' from *Box and Cox*.

In the large room, Mrs Peel's National winner, Poethlyn, and Major Bonham of the Scots Greys. In the last room a picture of artists and models at 'Tagg's Island. Where are all the jolly crew – friends of my bachelor life – who sat for it: Louie, Connie, Joyce, Mercer, Waters and the rest? Sunlight on a white cloth – blue shadows – champagne bottles. My first, and smaller version of it in Stoke-on-Trent Gallery is the better.

The poorest picture, 'The Painter's Wife', has the happiest memories. It was my first attempt at painting her before we were married. Being in love should have made the work a masterpiece. I hope I have painted better pictures of her since. Let me change over from faulty pictures to an almost faultless wife. A wonderful person on a horse, she had shown horses for her father at Richmond and Olympia and elsewhere since the age of twelve. We have, in the hall, a small, glass-topped table left us by her mother, filled with rosettes of every colour, dating far back into the nineties up into the twenties. . . . Rosettes won at Richmond Royal Horse Show, Olympia, the Bath and West and many other shows all over the country.

Twice she has won the Gold Cup at Olympia. First with her mare Susannah in 1911. Written on the base I read:

International Horse Show
London 1911
'The OAKLAND Champion Cup
Presented by
ALFRED C. VANDERBILT
For the best Riding Horse
Awarded to

Then again in 1926 for Alfred Loewenstein on his champion hunter called The Duke. I recall the scene in our Chelsea home. . . . Loewenstein's large car arriving at the door. . . . He had called for my wife to take her to Richmond Park. There she was to try two of his show hunters and settle which one to ride at Olympia. She gave each a good trial, and found The Duke was the one for her, and her judgment was right; he won the Cup. On another occasion at Olympia Lord Daresbury came into the ring, helped her to dismount, and escorted her out. . . .

The next thing I saw was my wife, seated between King George and Queen Mary in the Royal Box, chatting away pleasantly enough, King George laughing, enjoying some joke. Often had he seen her in the Row, and Queen Mary congratulated her on her immaculate get-up and her riding side-saddle. . . .

One of the greatest experts and judges of horses and horsemanship, the late Captain Vivian Gooch – who died at a great age, and had always walked ten miles every morning of his life – told me she was the best at showing a horse he had ever known. ‘Hers,’ he said, ‘was the iron hand in the velvet glove, the best hands, the best seat.’

I picture her now, coming through the large doors at Olympia, leading the procession of smart, well-dressed women, riding side-saddle, in the class for Ladies’ Hacks. She was clever enough always to come into the arena first – and with a pose! Unsurpassable!

But to my first sight of her at Richmond Horse Show, 1919, riding a dark chestnut horse, Dandy II. Here was a subject to paint – a good-looking woman on horseback, silk hat and gardenia – all complete. . . . Memories are moving. . . . A house near Aylesbury – a girl on a piebald pony; a commission. The girl’s father was the owner of Dandy II. He introduced me to the lady riding for him in the Ladies’ Hunters’ class. I asked her if she would sit for me one day.

‘Not likely,’ said she. ‘I once sat for an artist in Chelsea; a non-stop job – I gave it up.’

That winter she was hunting with friends in the Cottesmore from Oakham, where they had stables. Many a night did I wait on Euston station for the train bringing her back. In March 1920 we were married.

XXX

MY WIFE

If a man is married – and most men are – the best day's work, the best week's work, the work of a year – all that a man can do – is of little avail if he has not a good wife. Be he a bachelor, he can trot on and go great things, as many single men have done, but with a housekeeper.

A wife makes or mars a man. Maybe I am drifting. Then be it so. An artist, if he must marry and give 'hostages to fortune', needs a good wife, and many a poor artist has had one. I have known artists who owe all they have to a thrifty wife, and one of my perpetual sorrows is that I see too little of these saints – one in particular, whom I used to call St Joan, the wife of that truly English artist, the late George Belcher. Like George, and many others, I have been more than blest with a good wife. We were married quietly, took a car to Broadway, and stayed at the Lygon Arms for the Cheltenham March meeting.

I recall as I write the great horseman, Harry Brown, then at his zenith of riding, welcoming us there at Cheltenham, somewhere by the saddling ring. Afterwards my wife told me how, in the early days of the 1914 war, she was riding her beloved Kismet in the Row, and a little aggressive dog ran after her, barking at the mare's heels, and Kismet had lashed out, striking the dog stone dead. Forgetting the saddling, I pictured a charming young woman with a graceful seat, and possessed with a personality, saying to Harry Brown, then in the Life Guards, 'What can I do? I've killed that poor little dog,' and straight-away, Brown calls a trooper from the Knightsbridge Barracks and they dig a grave, and the little dog is buried.

It was not because I was at the races with a wife, and able to afford a honeymoon at the Lygon Arms with a large Daimler in attendance, that I so enjoyed that Cheltenham meeting. It was perfect March weather, a succession of days with cloud and sun. A good wife and a good hotel are of no avail against bad weather. Each day of sunlight and cloud shadow, with its six races, went all too soon. That week, thirty-one years ago, was my first experience of Cheltenham. Since then I have been to many of those meetings.

Back in our London home, Glebe Place, with my wife in charge, I was again at work. Not long after, I returned to stay with Tommy Bouch, the Master of

the Belvoir, and finished my pictures of the Belvoir Hunt, my wife going off to take charge of Castle House. From the day we set out for Cheltenham in the car, I have never paid any wages, bills, income tax or tithes. All this she has done for me. Ever since then, when wanting money to go to the club, to dine, or whatever it might be, I have said:

'Violet, give me some money.'

'How much?' she would say, even as she does now. 'One pound, two pounds, three, four, five, ten, twenty?'

As the years have gone on, like other wives, her responsibilities have increased: forms and stamps, stamps and forms, until her life has become a burden.

Glebe Place, our first London home and studio, was taken on a lease, which was running to its end. The sculptor next door had bought it. We had to find a house and studio, and in the end bought a site in Chelsea, and built our present home. Although it cost much hard-earned money, although I went in with a business wife as partner, there was never the same thrill as when I took possession, at twenty-one, of the carpenter's shop studio of my early days. In 1923 I was far too busy. No sooner was the large studio finished than a sitter was posing there on a wooden horse. Castle House, too often, and against my desire, was forsaken for Chelsea to paint portraits of people.

At the time of building I was reading Surtees again. *Mr Facey Romford's Hounds* – one of the best of his seven immortal books – was in my mind at the time, and we called our new home Beldon House. What reader of Surtees has not read of Beldon Hall? Should there be any uninitiated amongst my readers, and should they do as I advise, and read *Mr Romford's Hounds*, then they will bless me for many a pleasant winter's evening with this great classic. I could review the book right now, but refrain. Rather do I beg those who have not met Facey to lose no more time, and to find him at once.

But to my studio. Its walls were grey; it was large, spacious and part of my life. My wife, from the beginning, has looked after it, paid rates, ground rent, bills – everything. Thousands of hours have I worked in it. My pictures have gone there from Castle House each year for sending into the Academy, for twenty-eight years. Often I have sent more than the needed number. Then, in new mood, I see them there in their frames, rating some higher than others. When *Sending-in Day* arrives, when the van from the King's Road is at the door – always with the same driver and man to fasten the canvases in the frames – I never know which to send, and finally take the advice of the driver.

'Oh,' says he, 'that's the picture. No, that one's orlright, but it ain't got the stoile o' the other.'

Who can live in two homes? Being fond of both, we leave one with regret, looking forward to returning, yet sorry to leave the other. Sometimes I can work in London, sometimes I can't.

There is a garage, garden and trees in Chelsea – three small, sapling planes that I planted by the wall are now grown to giant trees, already once cut back,

which overshadowed our little garden. Nature is forceful. Nothing can stay the growth of a tree, and the London clay suits a plane. Each autumn the large leaves fall, scuttle round and drift into great heaps, and have to be dealt with. Blackbirds – descendants of bygone generations – sing there in the spring as loudly and clearly as they do in this garden at Dedham. No noise of traffic can drown their notes.

We have just come back from Chelsea, where we stayed Thursday night for Lingfield Races on Friday and Saturday. Lovely Lingfield it is called. On Saturday morning I made my usual memory sketch in the studio, with notes and drawings done on the Friday.

This is Sunday. A moment ago my wife came in from church at Lawford. There was not seating room for all the people. A wonderful parson! Thirty years ago my wife was already settled with her horses and dog here in what was my bachelor home. For thirty ears she has been the bright spot in my life.

It is seven o'clock. At any moment she may call me in for an omelette. A cock robin gives me a song – a warning that autumn is coming. It is chilly. The plane-tree here – a far mightier tree than those in Chelsea – rustles and whispers, stirring in my soul many regrets. Once more a summer is passing to the soft cooing of turtle-doves and the shrill twitter of a cock robin. Alas! I noticed the swallows gathering today.

There was yet one more home, in its way better than the other two. In a happy moment, when living in a rented house at Wootton Courtenay, my wife bought, for a song, a cottage adjoining the blacksmith's forge in that village below Dunkery Hill. For years this was her retreat in spring and autumn, and from there she went to meets, far and near, on Exmoor. She deserved those days, for not a week passed but she paid bills and sent the wages from Riverside, as it was called. For me, there was nothing to do except paint or play about, and she – well, when not attending to business, she galloped – more often than not in the rain, coming home sodden, ready for the next day.

She had accidents and falls which were soon forgotten. In her life with horses and galloping across Exmoor on all sorts – always riding them with a loose rein – her falls were few. As a young woman she had six months on her back with an injured spine. Once or twice – I can't remember when – she has broken her head, which seemed to quicken rather than retard the business side of her brain. A broken leg – her last hindrance – although separating her awhile from horses, strengthened her frugality in money matters. She arose from her couch with an inflexible resolve to save yet more for 'a rainy day', which had a double meaning for her: a shortage of money, or a hunt on Exmoor, where it never stops raining. As soon as she could ride again she was off to Exmoor, with a stud, ready to gallop. . . .

Here is a latter-day occurrence – the order of the day as seen through the window at Withypool. Rosy-faced, indomitable, the huntress, in bowler hat,

habit and short riding mackintosh, standing on the mounting-block. The horse with a covering over the side-saddle being led up for her to mount – the picture almost obliterated in torrents of driving rain. Not even the all-per-vading sound of the swollen, raging river in the valley below could quench her ardour for the chase.

One night, before a fire of blazing logs, with hot rum to comfort me, I tried to immortalize her prowess in verse:

My wife in the West never takes any rest;
She hunts in the wind and the rain.
Though sodden her vest, so strong is her chest,
She goes out and does it again.

The tempest may blow, like arrow from bow,
Her steeds on a loosely held rein,
Up hill and down dale, twelve miles in a gale,
They scorn the steep slope and the strain.

Her steeds sadly press'd on Sundays do rest,
Stretched out on the straw to regain
Their wind and their strength, and there at full length,
They lie until wanted again.

They hear the church bell, which is tolling its knell.
Above them, the old weather-vane
Is creaking distress'd and pointing sou'west!
And soon it is raining again!!

It rains and it pours, the river it roars!
It rose to such height in the night,
The hunting was stopped and the horses all popped
Their heads out to look at the sight!!

'Ha, ha!' they all neighed. 'It's the end of our trade!'
And the woman sat working so glum
At the seat of her breeks, which for five or six weeks
Had shown a small glimpse of her ——!

Alas! Riverside is sold after years of happy possession. How often did I ride out from there to Selworthy Beacon, or go painting at Luccombe. Enough of Exmoor memories and scents of the moor. Life is too short.

Whilst eulogizing and exalting my wife to the skies, I do not forget occasions when, like some unruly, unreasonable horse, she rears up violently. . . .

XXXI

PAINTING THE PRINCE OF WALES AND A CORNISH MASTER OF HOUNDS

THE first of my six exhibits on the list for 1921 is Robin Bolitho, Esq., the oldest Master of Foxhounds in the country at the time. This was a commission from the members and farmers of the Western Hunt, and although the amount subscribed was less than the figure I was asking at that time for such a portrait, I was only too anxious to paint this aged Master of Hounds, whom we had so often seen on the edge of the gorse with his double-peaked cap held up aloft, crying out, 'Yonder he goes!'

My wife accompanied me on this jaunt, and we stayed a while with old friends in the Lamorna Valley. To be nearer the kennels at Madron, we moved to the Western Hotel at Penzance, where, long before the war, I used to put up my horse on Saturday mornings and make merry for an hour or two with hunting friends in the bar.

In Trengwainton – a large house, reached by a long drive through a forest of rhododendrons – I used the library as a studio. I think Mr Bolitho was then eighty-five or six, and to get his head the right height above me for the portrait, at each sitting one of the grooms and the butler used to help the old gentleman from the floor to a chair, and from there to a table, where he sat on another chair whilst I sat working by the window. Not only was my model getting on in years, he was also fragile and delicate. In his exalted position on the table he gave his people in the house no little anxiety, and they had to keep an eye on him from time to time. I liked his uncommon appearance, his well-trimmed, pointed grey beard, his whole get-up: his black velvet cap with a small peak at the back, made for the wet Cornish climate; his extra snow-white starched stock; his scarlet coat, cleaned so often that its colour was faded to a delicate geranium-pink. His well-boned and polished boots shone, making the perfect high-light that I love to paint, and which many an artist before has loved to paint; and the tops were long and flesh-coloured.

'Are you sure you're all right, sir?' I would ask.

'Yes, good enough for another hour if you need it,' was the reply.

I must not forget here the little, dapper second-horseman, Dale. In the years before the war, I had only seen this diminutive man on a horse in his full glory: white cords, flesh-coloured tops, black coat with belt round his waist, top hat with a cockade – a real Hunt-servant or, to be more correct, pad-groom.

There was one other of the kind in this far-away Hunt: one far more ancient, who always followed his mistress, Miss Mabel Williams, throughout the Hunt – mostly at a walk or slow trot. Such wonderful sights pass with the years.

As I worked, every now and then the faithful Dale took a peep in at the library door to see all was well. Shorn of his hat and all his glory, he looked as though he never shed the clothes he was wearing, night or day. . . . A perfect fit, such as only an old-fashioned groom would wear, even to the box-cloth leggings and shining boots. Often in a hunt Colonel Willy Bolitho, hunting hounds, would call to Dale, 'Get up to the earth and stop him', and Dale, galloping hell-for-leather to the earth on the summit of the hill, dismounted, and facing the approaching fox, danced and yelled, 'Yi-yi-yi-yi'. He would have frightened a wolf. . . .

But to the portrait. During the sittings I grew to admire and respect that aged gentleman on the table. All went well with the painting, for was I not doing it for the approval of those West-country members of the Hunt – Lawyer Vennings, Butcher Dugdale and all those farmers I had known so well?

And what of Mr Bolitho's steed, Barum? I can remember hearing Mr Bolitho declare that he had the blood of a Derby winner in his pedigree. The picture was a fair representation of the quiet, well-mannered, dark bay horse that carried his eighty-six-year-old master as a good horse should. He was ridden on the snaffle, the curb-rein hanging loose from the long cheek. Then came studies for the landscape, Trengwainton Carn, a grey granite, precipitous outcrop of rock on the moor, as a background, under a grey, cloudy sky. I am reminded of a friend, Algernon Talmage, next in the election to the Academy after me, saying, when he saw the picture in the Academy, that it was a good sky! he also said the pink hunting-coat was good. So rare is praise from artists that we remember it.

As the work neared completion the interest of the Bolitho household and stable yard increased, until everyone said, 'Leave it alone', and I did. The picture was hung on the right of the centre in the first room – an honour in those days, when good pictures were still being painted by men like Orpen and others.

My second work on the list – 'The Grey Cob' – was of little account.

The title of the third picture was 'Black and White'; a picture of Dale in his cockaded hat, black coat, leather belt, white breeches and boots, with two young greys bred by Mr Bolitho; Dale riding one horse and leading the other, looking perky as only he could! a grey stone wall in the background – and so farewell to fragile Master and faithful servant.

The fourth picture was 'The Artist's Wife', a second portrait of the huntress, although not in hunting costume. I recall the painting of this picture of my wife a year after we were married. She sat on one of those two young greys at Trengwainton. (I am but testing memory.) . . . Even now I contemplate the scene as though it were yesterday. A dense plantation of rhododendrons behind me, my wife was wearing a pale, homespun habit, a soft brown hat, sitting on the grey horse on a grey day . . . the moors in the distance . . . the horse grazing the top of a stone-faced bank. I only complete this list of 1921 Academy pictures to show that I yet can rake up the past.

The fifth, not a bad picture – I look back on it with affection – was painted in pleasant country. A Hampshire landscape of pastures, pale stubbles, hedges and oak-trees. Two gipsy women – the right types, wearing large black hats with ostrich feathers, gaudy silk neckerchiefs and ear-rings – high up on the front seat of a low green wagon, driving across the scene; their black pony is covered in brass-mounted harness, and behind them, seated in the open wagon, gipsy boys and girls. Such a scene was to my liking – more so than the last of the six.

This was a portrait of the Prince of Wales on Forest Witch – presented to him by the *Field*, and placed in the Exhibition on 9th June 1921. Thereby hangs a story.

I had my own exhibition that year in the Alpine Club Gallery. The pictures shown were mostly of the Belvoir Hunt, which I painted when staying with the Master at Woolthorpe in the winter of 1919–20. Be that as it may, Knewstub, who was running my Exhibition, with an eye to business, had suggested, and rightly, that to make a grand finale for the show he should exhibit this large picture of the Prince of Wales and raise the entrance fee to half a crown. Knewstub, king of advertisers and master of propaganda, crowned his efforts by placing the portrait of the popular prince in the centre of the left-hand wall. Already – through Knewstub's press propaganda – the public were streaming in to see the picture, but the flow had scarcely started when it came to a sudden end. Sir Theodore Cook, editor of the *Field*, who had attended on the prince at all the sittings in my studio, and who had been the instigator, felt that only the Academy could show the picture to advantage, that Knewstub and I were using it as a draw. Sir Theodore approached the P.R.A., Sir Aston Webb, who approached King George, and got what he wanted – the King expressed a wish for the picture to be shown at the Royal Academy. The large picture was placed on an easel at the top of the stairs, and there it remained, my own Exhibition being robbed of its attraction.

What a good picture this should have been! The portrait was fair. The Prince himself thought it more like his brother. . . . The colour of the scarlet, too, was good, but, for some foolish reason, I made too much of an ancient oak on the right. Every old oak in this region had been looked at, and at last a gnarled specimen, centuries old, standing near the road in Mistley Park, was chosen. As a hoary oak, nothing could compare with it. From a careful study

I put it on the right of the picture, thinking, 'Future King - British Oak', and all the rest of it. Seeing reproductions of the picture, this forcible tree always asserts itself and makes me long to attack it. But there it is.

Here is the story of the picture. Sir Theodore Cook arranged it all, but did not expect me to paint a six-foot canvas. Yielding to an ambitious impulse, after one or two attempts I began the figure in the middle of this far-too-large composition. Each morning the Prince, bareheaded, wearing white breeches and boots and check coat, drove himself to the door of my studio. In the studio he donned his top-hat and pink coat and got on the saddle-horse, where he sat, now and then looking at himself in the mirror, giving his hat a further slight cock. Sir Theodore Cook, the unbeatable editor, was always there to receive the Prince, bringing with him in a basket cradle a bottle of vintage port and glasses. He also brought the famous red volumes of *Handley Cross* and *Mr Sponge's Sporting Tour*, which he used to read to the Prince as he sat. It was no easy business to paint this young man, whose name at that time was on every lip, and who had the greatest press of any man living. I felt I was up against it. The sittings come back to me.

At the time, McMillan, a neighbour and sculptor friend in the adjoining studio, had been making models for a competition for a memorial to the Machine-Gun Corps, to be placed near the Artillery Memorial on Constitution Hill. As we know, the competition was won by Derwent Wood's bronze statue of David and his Sling. With all due respect to Derwent Wood's figure, I thought McMillan's group of men better than the David which won, and I suggested McMillan should let me place the two small bronzes in my studio, where the Prince would see them. The little bronze group of men with a machine-gun, and the other of an exhausted Tommy, both stood on a table. . . . The Prince, sitting on the wooden horse, smoking his pipe, saw the two groups.

'What are those bronzes on the table?' he asked.

'Sir,' said I, 'I have taken them from my friend's studio next door for you to see.'

Then, looking at the one of the exhausted Tommy, he said:

'Is that for sale?'

I should explain, this little work of sheer genius was of a poor, mud-bespattered infantryman sitting on a bank, his legs outstretched, his hands, arms, head drooping, the weight of his accoutrements bowing him down. The small figure showed the British soldier done to the world, exhausted, but not beaten.

'Give it to me,' said the Prince, holding out his hands for it. I placed it on his lap as he sat on the wooden horse. Then, thinking for a moment as he gazed down at the bronze, he said, 'Poor b——!'

'May I see the man who did this?' said the Prince.

'Of course, sir, if you wish.'

At the end of the sitting I took the Prince next door, and he bought both bronzes.

But to the picture. Forest Witch, the mare the Prince is riding, stood in the Pytchley country at George Drummond's stables. Looking at the painting today, I am vexed to think that the foolish fashion of hog-maning and pulled tails should ever have existed and have been thought the thing. Again, I followed another stupid mannerism, of painting the equine model with ears pricked and its countenance turned towards the beholder. How much better for the horse, if walking, to be looking ahead! There may have been passages in the picture of the clipped-out horse which had their merits, but if I did it again I could make it a better picture. My mind had been too impregnated with the old oak and the turn of a horse's head. Already I imagine I am putting the picture right: the mare looking ahead, a mane and forelock, a proper tail like an Alken picture – and shorter legs. Then the oak-tree would have a dose. Last of all, an inch or two off the picture all round.

Were I to write only of those of my pictures which satisfy me, my task would be a short one.

XXXII

DEATH OF A DERBY WINNER- HUMORIST

THE list of pictures shown at the Academy in 1923 is: 'Humorist and Donoghue going out for the Derby', 'A May Morning at the Southcourt Stud', 'Thoroughbred Stallion, Radium', 'Brood Mares and Foals at the Southcourt Stud', 'Kilkenny Horse Fair', and 'My Horse is my Friend'.

It must be understood that pictures shown in a certain year would have been painted the year before. The titles of these six pictures convey more to me than I shall ever be able to describe, so I take only one – Donoghue and Humorist.

This was commissioned through a writer on the *Daily Telegraph* – the 'Hotspur' of that day – on behalf of friends and admirers who wanted to present a picture of the horse to the owner, Mr Jack Joel. It was an unsatisfactory picture; but, for all that, it awakens many memories. This, I believe, was the first of Donoghue's 'hat-trick' Derbys. To show how wrong it is to judge a horse: I was with Mr Donald Fraser, a breeder and owner of race-horses, when he took me with him into the holy of holies – the saddling paddock to see the Derby horses.

'I can't go in there,' said I.

'Come along,' said Donald, and began criticizing the horses.

'Has anyone seen such a lot? Look at that bay horse – common as dirt.' And so he went on about this horse and that, and then remarked with great scorn on a chestnut, 'Look at that brute over there! Look at his hocks! Could anybody ever see worse?' – This happened to be Humorist, who shortly afterwards was unsaddled as the winner of the Derby.

Some weeks later, after the Ascot meeting, staying with Charles Morton, the trainer of the horse, at Letcombe Basset, near Wantage, he told me about the horse bursting a blood-vessel in a gallop at Ascot before the race, and how they had decided not to run him. It was thus an easy matter to have the horse out in the afternoons to make studies of him. I had completed one of these on the Saturday and on the Sunday morning Charles Morton thought he would try a

bottle of champagne out of one of the many cases presented to him by Humorist's owner – a slight addition to the generous cheque he had received. Why I use the word 'generous' is because that summer I had motored with Donoghue to Newbury Race Meeting and, calling for Donoghue at his rooms over the fishing-tackle shop in Pall Mall, I went upstairs, to find his housekeeper and his valet searching high and low for a cheque for two thousand pounds which Joel had given him for winning the Derby on Humorist – not that Donoghue thought this at all a large reward. Newbury Races would not wait, and we left in a hurry in a large black Daimler.

How well I remember nearing Newbury on the main road! Occupants of charabancs – spotting Donoghue – shouted, 'Come on, Steve!' Near the weighing-room a telegram was handed to him, and he opened it. It was from his valet to say he had found the cheque in a waistcoat pocket.

To get back to the Sunday morning and Charles Morton and Joel's champagne. After sitting on a garden seat in the shade and drinking a bottle, Morton becoming friendly and talking of horses and racing, he went and opened another. Then came lunch, which left me in somewhat of a stupor. I sought the shade of the old yew-tree on the lawn, and, resting my head on a cushion or two, fell asleep. . . . After an interval of sheer oblivion, I heard a woman's tragic voice above me crying:

'Wake up, Mr Munnings, wake up! Humorist is dead!'

I opened my eyes. There stood Charles Morton's pretty little wife – far younger than he – looking like Ophelia in *Hamlet*, wringing her hands.

'Humorist is dead!' she cried again.

'Noll' said I.

Then the green door from the stable yard into the garden opened. Charles Morton came along the garden path with a bunch of keys in his hand. He hadn't turned a hair; neither the horse's death nor the champagne had affected him. He said in a quiet voice:

'You had better come along to the yard, and you'll see a sight you won't see again as long as you live.'

Out in the blazing glare of the chalk yard the light was dazzling. Becoming accustomed to the glare, I saw on the white chalk outside the door of the end box, a dark, dried-up trickle of blood. Morton then took the bunch of keys, unlocked the loose-box door and threw it open.

'There,' said he; 'did you ever see such a thing in your life?'

The horse lay dead on the straw, his head close to the door – the upper ear pricked, an eye still open. A large pool of blood was welling up to the threshold, churned into bright vermilion foam where the horse had breathed his last. Not only was there this pool of blood, he had thrown blood in great splashes upon the walls of the box, where he had turned round and round in his fright, and reared. Then Morton took me across to the iron manger in the corner. This was full of blood. Never should I have thought that the veins and arteries in any one horse could have contained such an amount.

It was a tragic sight. Looking down on this winner of the Derby, one almost expected to see him twitch his ear - so alive did he look.

'Well,' said Charles Morton, 'there lies fifty thousand pounds' worth!' . . .

And so we left the horse - and he locked the door.

Morton had phoned at once to Joel, and soon owner, wife and veterinary arrived in a very large car from Joel's home at Childwickbury. The final discussion on this tragic event happened over a cold supper. Mrs Joel wanted the horse's head to be stuffed and mounted. Mr Joel said:

'No, we'll only mount his feet.'

Still the talk went on about the horse's tragic end, Mr Joel fortifying himself with brandy and cigars until Charles Morton at the head of the table exclaimed:

'Well, let's not talk about it any more; we're getting like people at an Irish wake.'

At that the company arose, the large car rolled away and we went back into the cigar-smoke.

The next morning I saw the horse lying upon some straw on a flat lorry. A sad sight! How small and slight his corpse! A tilt was laid over it and fastened, and the dead Derby winner was driven away to Childwickbury to be buried.

What of the picture? Donoghue came to Glebe Place and sat on the wooden saddle-horse for his portrait in the black jacket and red cap. Being a novice at painting winners, I reckoned upon making this picture a star turn. It showed the horse, with Donoghue on his back, being led out of Epsom paddock. I made much of the piles of white newspaper blowing against the rails of the course - a thing which does not happen today. At that time, after Derby week, the Downs looked as if there had been a snowstorm. The breeze piled this litter of paper against everything catching the drift. I made a feature of tents in the background, bookmakers' signs, and the crowd on the rails. For all that, the picture wasn't right - nothing was right except Donoghue's portrait. The horse being dead, I heard no more from Galtry about friends and admirers desirous of giving the picture to Joel. The following year I sold it, with the copyright for reproduction, to a good friend, Mr Frost of Frost & Reed of Bristol, and, like many more of my paintings, the original found its way to America. And 'And it's oh to be a slave along with the barbarous Turk'. But I forget. . . . I mean, Oh, to be younger, with years ahead - to have the picture back and get a good capable pupil to draw it on another canvas, and then to paint from it another picture with the same colour and tone, making the wrong right . . . correcting all faults.

[Career of the ill-fated chestnut]

HUMORIST (Polymelus-Jest)

Owned by Mr J. B. Joel. Trained by C. Morton.

Ran five times in his first season, winning the Woodcote Stakes at Epsom, the Buckenham Stakes at Newmarket and the Clearwell Stakes at Newmarket. Was also second in the Middle Park Stakes at Newmarket, and the Champagne Stakes at Doncaster.

Had only two races the following year (1921). Finished third in the Two Thousand Guineas, beaten three parts of a length, same by Craig an Eran and Lemonora. Started a three-to-one favourite, and was ridden by Steve Donoghue.

His last race was in the Derby, which he won, beating his Guineas' conquerors - Craig an Eran and Lemonora - by a neck and three lengths.

He was ridden by Steve Donoghue. Craig an Eran was partnered by Brennan, and Lemonora by Childs.

The betting was five to one Craig an Eran; six to one Humorist; eight to one Lemonora.

Three weeks later Humorist was found dead in his box. The post mortem revealed that the aorta leading from the heart had been perforated and the horse had died of severe haemorrhage.



Sketch of the unsaddling enclosure at Epsom

XXXIII

HORSES!

We'll all go a-Hunting to-day
All Nature looks smiling and gay. . . .

Oh to be able to write of horses so that readers could see them; smell the exquisite scent of their coats, their skin; hear the clatter in the yard as they go out or return, the thud of galloping feet on the grass, the loud snort, like the blowing of a trumpet, as they career in freedom around the field. A flash of red gold has sped past the window across the near paddock. A snort; loud neighs from adjoining fields, where other horses career around, heads and tails erect. Then the flying animal in the near paddock pulls up, dead still by the railing under the chestnut-trees, looking like a dark statue in the shadow against the light beyond.

But what of my home; what of my horses? Could I but re-create a December scene in the meadow, myself in an old overcoat trying to paint a chilly horse, my thoughts would probably have run thus: 'Get it through well and you shall go to the Cock tomorrow!' – the Cock being the inn in Suffolk where hounds were to meet next day. There were occasions when all was ordered the night before – horses for my wife and myself. A perfect painting morning, and she went alone! Maybe a good spell of work was followed by a spell of hunting. A good hunt made me wish for another. A bad day sent me back to work. When I started a Vincent horse-box, I tried, if tired of work – desperate and longing to leave and forget it – to do six days in a week. There were the Essex and Suffolk, the East Essex, the Suffolk and sometimes the staghounds in South Norfolk. Always something prevented my doing this. A fog and frost cut out one day, so five days were my limit. This would mean a better state of hand and eye in the studio. Of that I am certain. A man's brain is better when he is well and fit.

But in spite of painting and blank days, nothing could daunt my 'ardour for the chase'. I gloried in seeing hounds run and trying to follow them on a good horse. There is time for everything. Too often we forget there are three

hundred and sixty-five days in a year. Too often did I stay at home, losing a good hunt and spoiling a picture.

As my stud of horses grew from year to year, I had more fellows in the stables to hold horses or sit or stand as models themselves. Every afternoon at three or four o'clock I sang out for a horse to be ready, and was off for a ride into thousands of acres of farmland. What a privilege to ride over Mr Poole's land – land now split up into smallholdings for apples and plums and the like.

Out hunting I made many friends. The horse – at times wicked – has been a connecting link between the wickedest sets of people. Not that my hunting friends were wicked. At the latter end of the season, when my wife was away for the spring hunting on Exmoor, my delight was to get up a party of hunting-friends and farmers and have a bachelor's dinner!

Here is a letter written to my wife who was on Exmoor:

Well, yesterday at St Osyth Flag; Sam and farmers – about eight of us – Sam full of his responsibilities. Before drawing the Priory spinneys he was giving his orders in loud whispers and placing his field. However, our real hunt was from Maldon Wood – a splendid hunt, a real hunt-about-hunt; and Sam was right each time. Oh, it *was* funny! On one occasion hounds were in a little copse, and Sam was outside. – 'Listen joost a mowment', says he. – Then, all of a sudden, 'By gum, they're away t'other side', and off goes Sam as if the devil was after him. Finally, after another try, we came home and left him getting ready for going home too, after losing the fox. Before leaving him I made him promise to come and join a few of us at supper. We'd expect him when we saw him. When he turned up with George Woodburn, very late for supper, he was still in his breeches and boots, but wearing a tweed coat, and full of himself. . . . Had news of the fox on his homeward journey and went right back and killed him. Thus ended the day, and eight of us sat down at 9 o'clock to eat. It was a good evening. Someone gave fox-hunting and coupled the toast with the name of the greatest huntsman in England. Sam Stobbart responded in great style. Thirza and Agnes had laid the table magnificently and Thirza had made *wonderful* salads. Everything all ready. I didn't get back myself until 7.15 – and Ben Portway had arrived and was being entertained by Jennings. – Birk took Jennings in the car and got him back just before six o'clock. – They followed Girling's car and saw most of the hunt and heard the halloaing. Sam told Woodburn he'd send him some eggs for his throat if he couldn't shout louder than that. – Well, Birk and Jennings were so excited once when they came with the news that the fox was in some kale, poor Jennings could hardly get his words out. – Well, well, it was first-rate and so was our evening – and so endeth the season, alas!

The above letter is indeed a memento of the past.

Yet one more verse from the best hunting song in the world:

Farmer Hodge to his dame says, 'I'm sixty and lame,
Times are hard, yet my rent I must pay!
But I don't care a jot if I raise it or not,
For I must *so* a-hunting today.

There's a fox in the spinney, they say;
We'll find him and get him away!
I'll be first in the rush and ride hard for the brush,
For I must go a-hunting to-day.'

I have said before that an artist meets with so many frustrations and setbacks that no feasting or falling under a table is too good a reward for his labours. No matter how good, how wonderful, or how incompetent an artist may be, his difficulties are great. If he thinks for a brief moment that he is overcoming them and has achieved his ends, he deserves compensation, if only for thinking so. Bless him! His is the life of laughter and tears.

The following lines were written to a friend with a business in Alexandria who always spent the hunting season in his old country, the Essex and Suffolk. Each new horse was always a wonder – a star turn – until it proved otherwise, and he always took pork sandwiches out with him when hunting.

PORK SANDWICHES

When fog hangs o'er us like a hood,
And raindrops drip from every stalk,
I cuddle up by Groton Wood
And eat my sandwiches of pork.

Where'er I live, where'er I stay,
Where'er my quarters chance to be,
I order that each hunting day
Pork sandwiches are made for me.

Some might despise my homely fare;
But, then, they do not know the joys
Of jumping jumps no others dare,
Of having appetites like boys.

Close packed inside my sandwich-case
I carry them until I feel
The moment comes to say my grace
And eat my tasty little meal.

When taking from its paper bed
My last sweet sandwich, doubly dear,
My patient horse now lifts his head:
'Is that a whimper that I hear?'

The sandwich goes back in the box –
It is too good to gobble down –
And sure enough it is a Fox!!
A Fox it is, for half a crown!!

Oh, what a scent! Oh, what a smell!
We're well away from cover-side,
My little sandwich there as well,
And now I'll show 'em how to ride!

We gallop on through heavy ground;
A hairy fence is looming near;
My horse has cleared it in a bound –
That hairy fence is in our rear.

And when I'm on my homeward way,
And when the hounds have lost the fox,
The little sandwich seems to say,
'I still am waiting in the box!'

The moment now at last has come,
My sandwich still is safe and sound;
I must not waste one little crumb
Or spill a morsel on the ground.

And after all these many years,
I still do lift that silver lid,
And munch and munch with thankful tears,
And think of all the jumps I did,

Of all the pigs, of all the bread,
Of all the mustard, pepper, salt,
With which my stomach has been fed,
And not a sandwich with a fault.

When in my coffin I shall lie,
With face and hands as white as chalk,
Ah! place upon me with a sigh,
One little sandwich made with pork.

Now to the horses. The years have not dimmed the halo above each devoted head. Almost in a mood of pensive melancholy, I look at my stables or meadows – some sixty acres of well-cared-for pasture where spirits of departed horses haunt the scene. In mind I can see each in turn. Those which trot across to me will be in the foreground of my picture. Were I to draw a pen-portrait of every horse – and I could – this chapter would grow into a large book. Besides, a lot of people today are forgetting what horses look like, and may not want to read about horse psychology. There are too many to put in these pages, so I leave some of them alone – far off. Had I the wealth, and could I live again, I would go on breeding, accumulating horses until something emerged approximating my ideal.

But to the humble stud from Cornwall. The parent grey mare had been sent to my brother's farm for milk-float work and odd jobs. Her first-born – a

brown mare – was a good model and ride, though not so reliable in harness. The grey daughter, Peggy, was all I could wish for in manners and looks. Patrick had grown into a good horse, and could get over the Suffolk country. He was my favourite, I think.

Looking out of the window, I see two now in the life – peaceful, happy. . . . But I am digressing again.

The next additions were three horses belonging to my wife: first came Rosemary, a big chestnut mare, almost thoroughbred – a grand, old-fashioned type with a long, swinging stride. What shoulders, girth and limbs, and what a pattern to study! Like an old print; and a rare model to paint. Then came a swell brown horse, wasted in such a country as ours, which she had been hunting with the Cottesmore. Being sound and valuable – the sort that needed two days a week – and my wife having strong business instincts, she accepted a good offer for the horse from Drage. Serpi, as the horse was called, went to the Pytchley Kennels, and later on carried Freeman.

Her third was a jewel – Kismet. This mare, a favourite, had carried my wife with the Whaddon, the Cottesmore and in the Row. Lord Ribblesdale used to ride her there. Kismet had won at many a horse show. As I write I look up at silver cups and a long, blue silk streamer ribbon – a trophy won years and years ago tilting the ring at Roehampton. A wealthy man, with a hunting wife and a large string of hunters, might forget which were his first or second horse in such and such a hunt the week before. Without wealth, and with our small stud, each horse was a friend. Many readers know the joys of possessing one horse. One good, sound, quiet horse is all the ordinary man needs.

How my small family of horses doubled and even trebled itself is a problem that needs some unravelling. I recall them as they amble up to me from the shades; none is forgotten. A mare of parts, the high-mettled, energetic Julia, was an early addition. She was bought by a farmer out of a sale of Army horses after the 1914-18 war, which had absorbed the best from every hunting district in England. I had seen the mare out hunting, jumping gate after gate – a well-bred, dark chestnut, with beautiful head and neck. But she was hot, and went better in a plain snaffle and standing martingale. She cost seventy pounds, and carried me well for years. She liked a strong, formidable pole over the top of a fixed-up gate; the higher the pole the better she jumped it. She shook her head against restraint, and when she meant going it was best to let her go. Once upon a time, on a blank day, my wife, a farmer friend and myself were in a wood near some strong posts-and-rails separating the wood from a field of young wheat. Maybe I had emptied my flask; the talk being about Julia, I said to the farmer:

‘Would you like to see her jump those rails?’

‘I would,’ was the reply, and over we went with a foot to spare – such a leap!

I was thrown forward as the mare landed. In spite of a standing martingale, she threw up her head and hit me on the nose, and the crimson stream ran. Across the wheat we went, to the derisive cries of my wife. . . .

'Come off that wheat!' shouted the Master in the distance.

Another instance. Myself, with gout in both feet, wearing leggings and cloth gait-boots. We had been waiting in a lane by a wood, when a fox went away with hounds on its line. I put Julia at a hairy fence with a drop and ditch on the far side. Clearing the lot without touching a twig, she landed on all four feet, whilst I landed on my two in front of the whole field. A good cure for gout! However, hounds were running, and the gout was forgotten. Again in the saddle, I passed those who thought it funny to see a man with gout jumped off his horse on to his gouty feet. . . . Enough of dear Julia. What a mare she was!

In my absence in America, a rich friend, with an estate in Sussex and a taste for pictures, who hunted with the Pytchley, had a deal with my wife. He was tall, riding some sixteen or seventeen stone. In his stable was a big Irish mare, not quite up to his weight. Since I was making so many dollars in the States, my wife, thinking I deserved to be well mounted, had given him a picture for the mare. On my return I was taken to the stables to see Dollar Princess, as we re-named her – a bay, with mane and forelock, and fine, sensible head and eye. Without exception she was as good and kind a character as my beloved Anarchist. Full of anticipation, more than once did I box her by rail to my old country and have a hunt with the Norwich Staghounds. What hunts they were! A bold jumper, she would face anything. She took a place in her stride. A fool could ride such a horse. She could leap a five-bar gate, her rider holding a glass of water in his hand without spilling a drop. I recall how Mr Prince, my American friend, once said that a man had only one good horse and one comfortable pair of shoes in his life. The Dollar Princess would be my choice – but, then, I am forgetting Anarchist . . . and Patrick!

The years went on; I was a man of means! My wife had found me a stunner. What better than find one for her? Although my friend Bullard has disappeared awhile from these pages, it does not mean he had departed or was down and out. On the contrary, fortune had favoured him – as it does the brave; for Bullard was a brave horseman. He had attained a position, as Master of the Dunston Harriers in Norfolk, and still made trips to Ireland, with an eye for a horse. We stayed with him in his nice house at Stoke Holy Cross with stabling, kennels and paddocks about him. This trip was arranged for my wife to ride a mare called Migrant, bred by an old Norfolk acquaintance, the late Bob Wood, who bred Bovril III, a horse that almost won a National. Migrant was by Chatsworth, a sire belonging to King Edward VII, that stood at Sandringham. Bullard bought the mare from a captain who had given up trying to ride her in the show ring because she had a light mouth and wasn't easy to ride. Dark bay, sixteen hands, with a deep girth, she was a grand stamp. After a ride I spent half an hour with Bullard in an inn called the Rummer at Stoke Holy Cross, he asking a hundred for her and finally accepting ninety.

Migrant carried my wife season after season, not only with the local hounds, but also with the Devon and Somerset. Often and often I used her as a model.

She appeared in a water-colour, 'A Little Piece of England', which I sold for more than four times the price paid for her.

The earlier the horses, the plainer the memories. There were two 'foreigners' that my wife bought from our friend Stewart Richardson, who bought horses in France. One was Chip – we called him Chips – a French thoroughbred by a horse called Alcantara, out of Blue China. It is a strange coincidence that when staying with Frank Carter in Chantilly I showed him an Exmoor photograph of my wife on Chip.

'Chip? Chip?' said Frank when I told him the horse had come from France and had been running in steeplechases over there and had been a winner of nineteen. Frank, still looking at the photograph, said, 'Chip? Let me see. I was training him as a two-year-old. As a three-year-old I sold him to the Duc de Cazes. Ask the head lad in the yard, who has been a steeplechase rider; he rode Chip in his first races.'

The man confirmed what Carter had told me about the horse.

'You couldn't touch his head, and had to leave him alone,' said he.

What a beautiful little horse was Chip: a bay with white hind legs, short in the back, deep in girth, an araby head with crested neck like a stallion – the most perfect of hacks. Stewart Richardson's man, Taylor, schooled the horse for my wife, and she showed him in the Ladies' Hack Class at Olympia. He was pulled out at once for first prize; but when a lady judge rode him round the arena he 'wouldn't ride for her', as they say.

Other thoughts of Chips – past images – come back to me. To shake off my melancholy, let me paint a Christmas sketch.

Scene I: This very room – then the dining-room, the festive room. A friendly party still sitting round a steaming bowl of punch – I smell the aroma of lemon-peel now. My wife, who had mysteriously gone from the room, comes back and takes her seat.

A loud knock on the door.

Cooper comes in. 'A gentleman outside wishes to see you, sir.'

'Who is it?' I call out, irritated at the loud knock.

'He says he knows you, and hopes you'll give him a minute.'

I go into the hall; there stands Chips, with Harvey, the stud-groom, holding him! I go back into the dining-room and warn everyone to be silent a moment.

'There's an old friend out in the hall. Would anyone like to meet him?' I ask.

Scene II: A spacious hall, with the staircase going up on three sides; a round table in the middle, a long oak table by the wall under the stairs; holly and ivy decorations up where they should be – on top of the tall clock, over the pictures, on the antlers above the doors into the library. Everyone in cracker-caps gathering round the sweet Chips, all making enough noise to frighten the quietest horse. But he remains calm. Has he not been to shows – to Olympia? Has he not travelled about France to race-meetings, jumped steeplechase

courses, seen and heard thousands of the human race yelling at finishes? Chips, eating apples, is not moved outwardly – only inwardly; and before he goes he leaves his card on the rug.

Calling up these past scenes does not dispel melancholy, which grows, alas! as I think of Chips and the others. . . . But to get back to them and the other foreigner, The Kaffir.

The Kaffir was a Hungarian, also bought from Stewart Richardson. Comparisons are odious. When I think of my rides on The Kaffir, I should never say that other horses were better than he. He was one of those chosen to make up my wife's string, and for years and years went to the Devon and Somerset country. For sheer intelligence The Kaffir was unbeatable.

Looking at a pencil-written list, I see I possessed thirty-four horses from first to last. This may sound a small number, but it was thirty-three too many for an artist; and now I contradict myself, for I have often declared that horses were my inspiration. Four names I bracket together – Stockings, Woodbine, Lizard, Grey Plover, not counting Migrant, Chips, The Kaffir, Cheena or Kismet. These were my wife's special Exmoor group. Grey Plover, once the property of Sir William Cook, was a big, grey, thoroughbred mare which had not been in training, owing to the first war. She had bred two foals, and was given to a lady, a friend of ours. The mare being hot, she passed her on to my wife. A word more about Grey Plover. My wife's first hunt on her was with the Devon and Somerset – a fifteen-mile point. She rode the mare on a double-rein snaffle, with a loose head and a brave heart. Afterwards the mare lay down in her box for a day and a night, cured of being 'tiresome', as my wife said, and carried her for six seasons running without a fall.

Letter written from Newmarket to my wife.

*6 Edith Villas,
Rous Road,
Newmarket.
Wednesday.*

Dear Violet,

I thought you'd like to hear first hand about Grey Plover from her owner, Sir William Cook, whom I met yesterday evening at Donald Fraser's. He thought a lot of her. By Grey-Leg by St Serf, as you know – Therefore Isaac is her nephew because Goblet, Isaac's father, is also by Grey-Leg.

Sir William told me that he gave one thousand eight hundred guineas for her as a youngster and she ran once at the beginning of the war and was fourth in a small race. Then because of the war he took her out of training and sent her to the stud.

Another grey, a faultless friend – Isaac – was sent to me by Isaac Bell from Ireland.

The name of Woodbine is far too illustrious to pass over without a word. Fifteen hands, all breeding and fire, the essence of energy, she flew over Exmoor with my wife, who rode her in a large double bridle on a loose head.

Stewart Richardson had bought and schooled her for a show hack, thinking to sweep the board at the shows with such a sort. But Woodbine had a bee in her bonnet; Stewart Richardson must have thought well of her, for he bought her in at his sale at Tattersall's for two hundred and seventy guineas. Before she came to us she had been mated with a premium sire, Maître Corbeau, and so arrived with another horse inside her, which was delivered the following spring, and grew up to rival even Anarchist. He was sixteen hands, a perfect ride and perfect hunter. As a four-year-old, we sent him to Dauntsey to be schooled by Richardson's nagsman, Taylor – a king of nagsmen.

I cannot refrain from a memory of a hunt on Wildbird, Woodbine's son. Late in the season I took him in the horse-box to a meet of the Norwich Stag-hounds at Saxstead Green in Suffolk, and I rode him on my own line through a good hunt, taking place after place. Deep, wide ditches with rough hedges, gates – all came alike to him. Thinking of that dear horse – Woodbine's son, Wildbird – I again give way to regrets.

A third grey – Peggy's daughter, Magnolia, sired by Happy Man, winner of the Gold Cup, 1921 – came into the world by chance. My friend Bowcher and I were at Newmarket together with our hacks. Mine was Peggy, dappled and handsome.

'She has a fine countenance,' said Bob Collings to me one morning on the Heath.

Bowcher and I had ridden down to the start of a long-distance race; we were off our horses.

'That's a good sort you've got, A. J.! She's in use. Why don't you breed her?' Then, standing back with an expert's eye, a critical glance: 'A bit heavy in the shoulder. Send her to Happy Man, a Gold Cup winner; he's got wonderful shoulders. He's standing here at the Scaltbeck stud; his fee's only eighteen guineas.' Thus spake Bowcher.

Next day I rode Peggy to the Scaltbeck stud and saw her mated to Happy Man. Magnolia was the result. Often, when riding this mare to hounds, did I curse Bowcher and his enthusiasm for horses. Her sire, Happy Man, I am told, was hot, by a hot sire; hence his low fee of eighteen guineas. But what a model to paint – this grey mare! And what a stayer! Often on a winter afternoon have I taken her with Wildbird in the horse-box to the large enclosures used by the cavalry at Colchester, one being something over two miles round – the place for an artist needing exercise! After a peaceful twenty-minute gallop on Wildbird, I got on to Magnolia for a sweating. From one enclosure to another, on and on, back to the large grass plain, round this four times, doing about eight miles, at rather more than hunting pace, I would be in a proper sweat. Back at the horse-box, the driver led the mare round to cool off before putting on a rug. Inside the box I was having a rub down, getting into a warm, dry vest, jumper and overcoat; and so home. Listening to the summer wind sighing through the leaves of the old plane-tree outside the window, I, too, sigh as I write these recollections. Both these horses are gone.

Dollar Princess was also mated to a premium horse, Lord Hilary – a big, brown sire with poor front action, popular in Devon a year or two before. To get the Princess in foal, I sent her off following the stallion to places where he rested for the night. The mare being 16.2 hands, the result was a large colt called Sweet William. Believing in liming my pastures, horses that I bred grew large bone. Dollar Princess's son was just under seventeen hands. So kind and intelligent a child could ride him. Like his mother, he never refused, never was down, could get over anything with ease, and was worthy of a better country and a better end; after a year of war, with the forced ploughing-up of nearly all my grass, with the stoppage of food and a starvation ration, with others he was destroyed.

There was another mare, a wonderful hunter, which I had forgotten. I bought her from Mr Sherwood of Newmarket, who bred her. She was by Simon Square. I saw her behind a string, with a head lad riding her. Already I had too many horses, but I bought her, thinking her a good sort to breed from. The mare was a natural jumper and could gallop. Later she produced a dark-brown son, landing me with yet another horse. I have said somewhere that I have sold only four horses in my life; this one was sold as a four-year-old for the simple reason that I had too many. He was hard and sound, and could do three days a week if needed. The following year I saw him placed in a point-to-point. His mother was given to a farmer friend, who performed great deeds on her with the Essex and Suffolk. A few years back he still had one of her daughters.

Pineapple – a small, dark chestnut horse with white legs and white face – came from the stables of the Devon and Somerset, and had been carrying Ernest Bawden, the huntsman. My wife had begged the Master to let her have Pineapple for a hack after they had finished with him. The little horse carried me about Exmoor seeking elusive herds of wild ponies to paint.

Anarchist, Rose, Rufus, Cheena, Cherry and Lizard have already been described. The last four are still alive; Lizard has hindquarters wider than those of any Suffolk Punch. Through his manners and quiet behaviour on the road, he is still in the land of the living.

I had forgotten another wonder. Being full of money at the time, I again went to Bullard at Stoke Holy Cross to try a big mare with his harriers. She was by Cabra Castle, and had the strange markings of the Cabra Castle breed – a large white blaze, a blue eye and a white hind leg. The marking of horses is a strange thing. After trying the mare over a country with Bullard and hunting her next day, I asked my friend, Professor Reynolds of Newmarket, to vet her, and he passed her sound. The cheque I gave Bullard was my top figure for a horse. Like others I have had, she, too, was worthy of a good country. What a jumper and what a model! She was 16.2 hands, with a lot of bone. Her sex saved her when war broke out. She was given to a friend who owned a stud, kept premium stallions and bred horses.

The Glenesky mare, as we called her, sired by a Cambridgeshire winner,

bought at the Newmarket sales, was a good model, but a careless jumper. One day she went clean through a low gate, like Mr Sponge's horse, Multum in Parvo; luckily the gate was rotten. She gave me no confidence and was never a hunter.

Still they keep appearing in memory, these horses. What of the little chestnut bought as a two-year-old from Mr Donald Fraser of Tickford Park? A charming little horse. Shortly before the war, because he was so quiet, I gave him to my dear friend, Bernard Walke, the famous parson of Saint Hilary in Cornwall, whose church was broken up by the Kensit brigade. He mentions this little horse – A. J., as he calls him – in his book, *Twenty Years in St Hilary*. Poor Walke was all but dying of consumption, and in the end was too weak to ride. The horse came back, and met his fate with the others during the first year of the war. My last ride on him was to Selworthy Beacon, where I dismounted and sat looking at the sea for hours.

Can I have forgotten Stockings? A well-bred, chestnut mare, fifteen hands, with a white streak down her face, and two white hind legs. She was one of my wife's favourites, and was bought from a farmer after seeing her out several times.

At the height of horse-keeping and hunting activities I put up a jumping lane at the far end of the home paddock, with a pole, a stiff gate, a built-up fence and ditch. It became the thing on a Sunday morning to put some of the horses into this lane over the jumps. There I could study action and movement, and get some excitement out of it as well.

Still thinking of hunting days, hunting farmers and friends, I recall one – Captain Parker, known as The Goblin. He had achieved notoriety in better Hunts than the Essex and Suffolk. When I knew him, although possessing good hunting kit, including a top hat by Lock, he was horseless. He had been in the States with the Rolling Rock Club, outside Pittsburgh, schooling horses and teaching the club how to dress. The Goblin had good failings; this was why he came back. He had known my wife in Whaddon Chase days. At a meet on the Essex side, hounds were at an inn near a green, when a cheerful-looking little fellow, with a large pale face and merry eyes, walked across from a car and spoke to my wife.

'The Goblin!' said she in amazement. 'What on earth are you doing here?'

He was travelling for Twining's tea, and was living near Bury St Edmunds. I took to The Goblin like a duck to water. He belonged to Surtees, and was a first-class horseman, and could school a horse. With my younger ones coming on, here was a chance! Often did The Goblin come in his car to dine and stay the night and hunt next day. To see him in the mornings was a joy! His clothes were perfect, so was the very tall Lock hat built to his own fancy. Many and many a time did he and I do a little quiet schooling on the way to a meet; many and many a time have we left the Hunt after a poor day and ridden home across country, myself on an older horse giving The Goblin a lead on a younger one.

'Come on, Goblin!' said I, 'let's go home.'

Then would we have ten miles of it, by many a lane, track and headland; across many a stubble and plough, making a bee-line for home and a bath, and – what The Goblin liked – a bottle of wine with his dinner. It always meant sitting up until long past midnight, talking about horses. He, like Dick Bullard, was a man after my own heart. I can imagine no better way of spending an evening after a ride across country on two good horses. The Goblin was then living outside Newmarket in a lodge at Moulton Paddocks, opposite the Limekiln gallops. Meeting an acquaintance connected with Twining's at the Garrick Club, in our talk I brought up The Goblin's name, and heard that he was no longer with the firm. And so, here's to The Goblin! Strangely enough, The Goblin is still in the world and with horses. Amongst the letters that came to me after the publication of *An Artist's Life*, was one from The Goblin:

My dear Sir A. J.

Having read the *Horse and Hound* review of your book, thought I would just drop you a line for remembrance of old times, when I used to come to Dedham and enjoy, not only riding your horses but the hospitality of Lady Munnings and yourself. The days you write of bring back many happy memories, especially re Norwich Stag. Your old departed pal Dick Bullard had such a good pencil sketch of Thackeray drinking out of a pint pot and underneath was the word 'Salt'. Do you remember drawing it?

(Thackeray had been telling us why a long hunt made him thirsty. 'You are breathing the salt in the perspiration rising from the horse all the time,' he said. This drawing showed him making this assertion.)

The Goblin continues:

Do you remember a very pleasant evening after hunting we went to Bowchers, where we had to sample a small parcel of claret he had and very good it was? His study reminded me of the background of one of Leech's pictures in some of Surtees works. . . .

Yours,
THE GOBLIN.

In my first book I told of those who held and looked after my horses, of my first groom, Curzon, and another – a Cornish lad called Ned. Such people are part of one's life.

This has been a chapter of horses. Where would the horses have been – or my painting and riding – without the grooms? Let me recall grooms who have come and gone, have bedded down, fed, watered and held my horses here at Castle House. Already on the spot when I took possession was Garrett, with a combative wife and two boys and a gardener. Next, an ex-dragon – an old soldier, Lowman – followed by a deaf fellow who shouted. Then came a West-countryman, Blackmore, from the Devon and Somerset kennels, and with him, Harvey as stud-groom. A North-country addition came from the kennels of the Bramham Moor who had helped me there when I was painting the

hounds. For a term he schooled young horses. A good horseman, too fond of a glass. Other helpers came – the two still with me are Bayfield, who has remained over thirty years, and Slocombe, nearly as long.

All of them in the past have held horses and posed as models. Were I faced again with all my work, I could pick out and name their figures in each picture.

I take a look back to those days when, as I worked in the studio or a paddock, I could hear the stud coming along the road home from walking exercise – six or eight horses in rugs with red binding and the letters A.J.M. in red on the corners. I hear their feet on the road now. Or again, when there was snow I would go out of the studio door to watch them. If a fine morning, what a picture they were in red-and-black-striped blankets and rugs against the white field – a string of them casting long, blue shadows, and their feet crunching the frozen snow! More than once did I run back to the studio with a helper to get out my things for painting, and when the string came along I halted them in the light I wanted and began – first placing them on the canvas, and then going on with a pair, whilst the rest kept moving until their turn came to be painted; myself meanwhile standing on a big board, wearing ski boots made in Austria. The best I ever wore. They stand in the cloakroom still; reminders of those days of winter-painting that are gone. Horses gone. All gone, like the blue shadows on the snow.

A last scene: One bright June morning, with easel and open paint-box upon my arm – as I so often carry it for a short distance – I was passing from the studio meadow to another, where preparations were going on for a day's painting. Rose, the brown mare, and a filly friend, both silly, skittish and young, stood watching as I bore my awkward burden along. Rose must have said to her friend, 'There's his nibs going to work; let's give him a shock!'

Just as I neared the gate, Rose made a dart at me, giving the underside of the large wooden paint-box a smart tap with her heels, sending paints, tubes, palette, brushes and bottles flying all over the grass.

'You —— bitch!' I shouted, as she went careering off with the other, not caring a damn – not even if she'd broken my arm – knowing she had played a dirty trick. . . .

'Curse all damned horses to hell! Come and help me to pick up these b—— things!' I cried to my helpers in the next field.

In that field where I was about to work, to earn money to keep Rose in comfort, there stood a sober, well-intentioned steed waiting to serve as a model. Did he approve of this horse-play? I do not know which is worse – cleaning the seat of one's trousers after sitting on the palette, or gathering up scattered contents of a paint-box out of wet grass.

One memory begets another. Three of our young horses were in hunter classes at a horse show, and this same brown mare had won a first. When standing near, talking to friends, I received a terrible blow – a kick on my

behind from Rose. No effort of memory is needed to recall that surprise; when I stand too long at work a pain on the spot reminds me of white tents and dark elms, neighing of horses, and the band playing, and roars of laughter from my friends and my wife who was saying, 'That'll teach you not to breed horses'.

For all that, in later years the mare carried her nine seasons on Exmoor, galloping thousands of miles.

Buy the best hay, the best corn for a horse; it respects you no more, and if you have a fall it will gallop away and leave you there.

Apropos of my wife's remark, I recall a saying, 'Fools breed horses for wise men to buy'. For all that, horses played their part in innumerable acts and scenes in my life, and still haunt me in many shapes. I see, as if it were yesterday, their varying countenances and expressions and I hear them call out at feeding time. . . .



Study for my picture 'Eleven o'Clock' (40" x 36"). The Cabra Castle mare is on the left of the picture. Peggy is in the centre and Stockings to the right (*see page 142*)



ABOVE My mother as a young woman, and a sketch made of father at about sixty

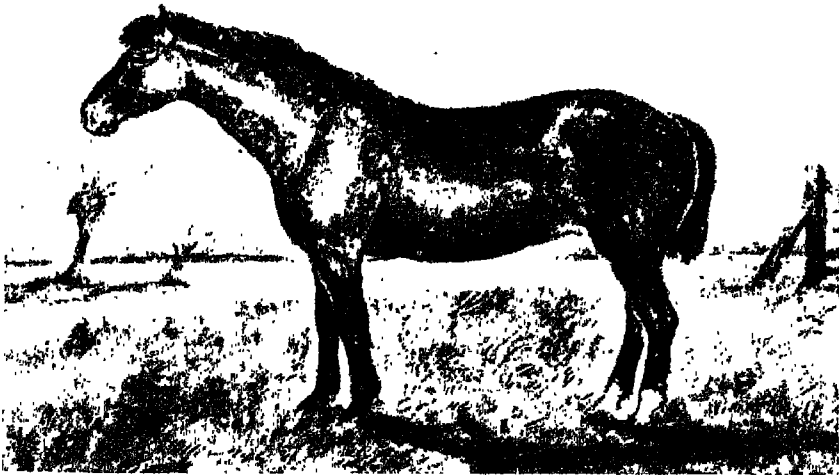
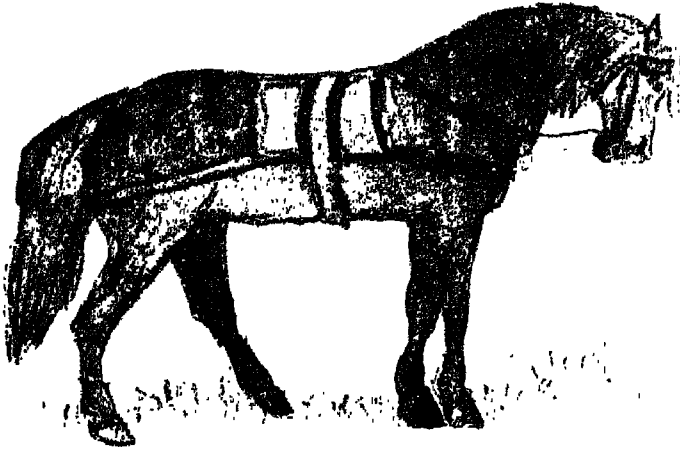
BELOW My mother with thirty-year-old bay pony Fanny and the dog Friday. (See page 5)

PLATE II



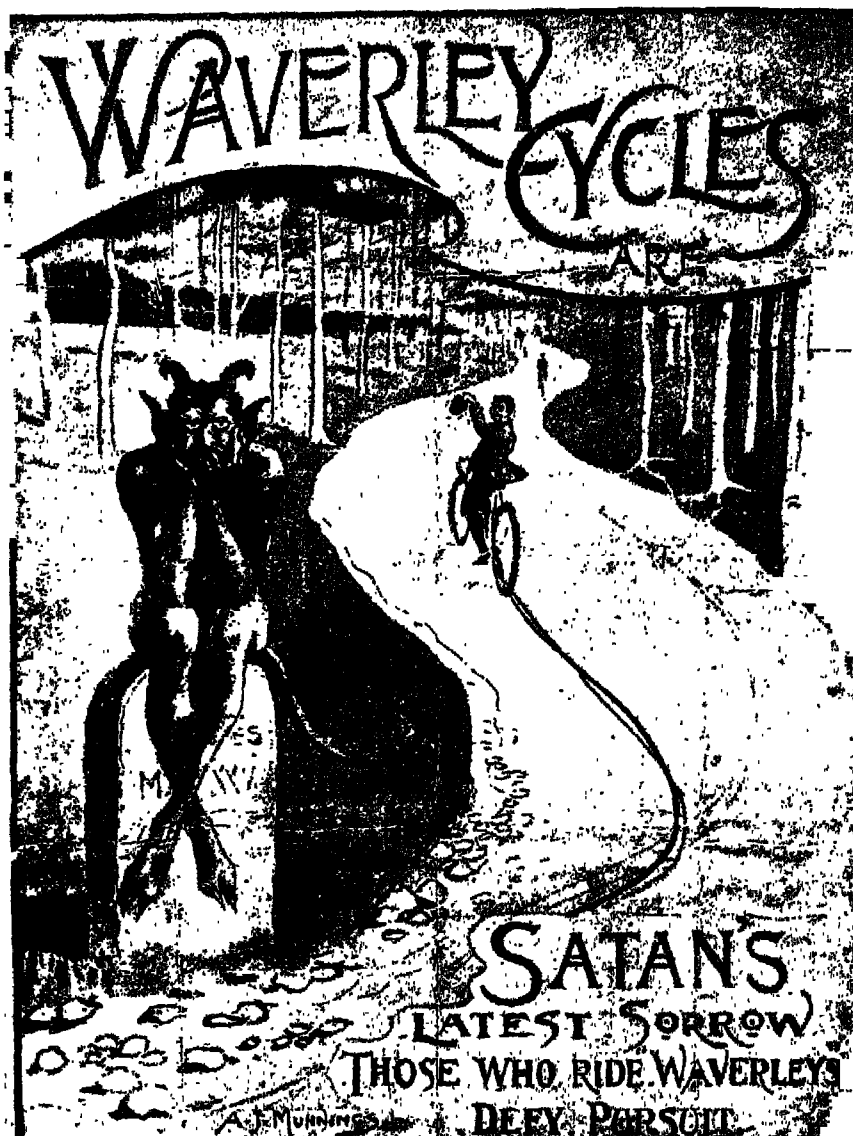
ABOVE The back of Mendham Mills - a drawing shown in School of Art vacation competition

BELOW Photograph of Mendham Mills, showing lukem platform for unloading sacks of corn



ABOVE A beautiful toy horse which my father gave me on my fourth birthday. I called it Merrylegs and this drawing was done when I was six

BELOW Early water colour of my mother's pony Fanny, done at the age of nine

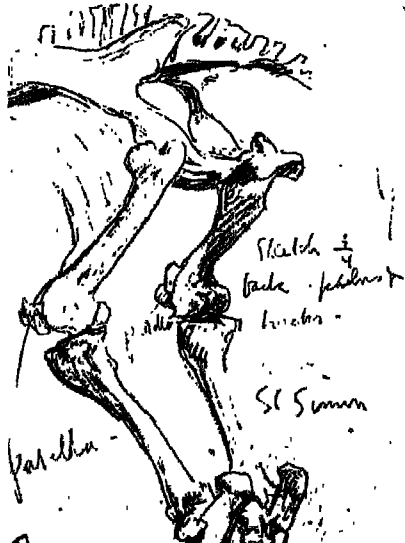
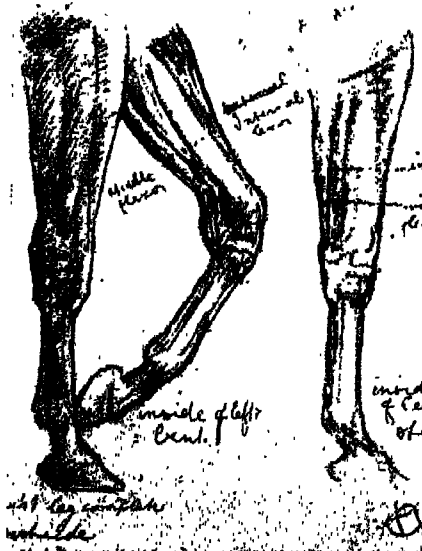
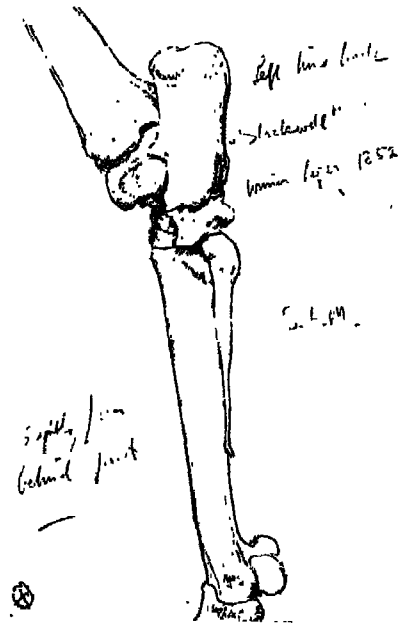
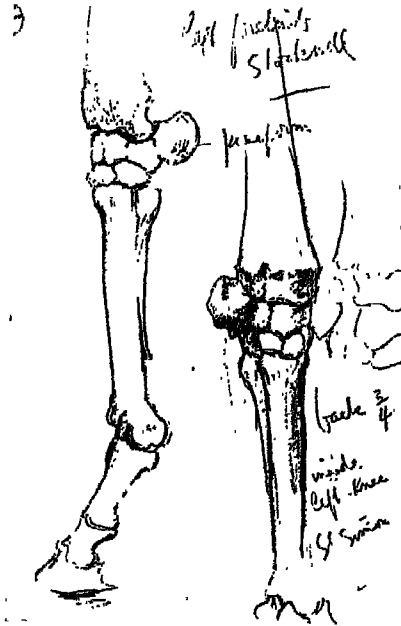


ABOVE A design that won first prize of three guineas in a competition in *The Cyclist* for the best advertisement of Waverley cycles. Date 1895.
(See page 38)

OPPOSITE Poster six feet in height. Design which won the Gold Medal at the Poster Academy at the Crystal Palace in 1899







TOP LEFT Left fore limb of Stockwell TOP RIGHT Left hind hock of Stockwell BOTTOM LEFT An anatomical page from early sketch-book. (See chapter XII) BOTTOM RIGHT Left knee of St Simon
OPPOSITE Old Fahrim Butcher, fat short, beard d and narrowful



20" x 24"

'The Last of the Fair', a picture with a story in it, bought by the Preston
Collection, 1904. Painted 1899 at twenty-four



Each 24" x 20"

'I was painting those 'Gyppoes', as I called them, right to the end of hon-nick-lins' (See b-ee 106) ' and sure enough if I needed it, the



A stone-breaker friend, John, drawn in Cornwall

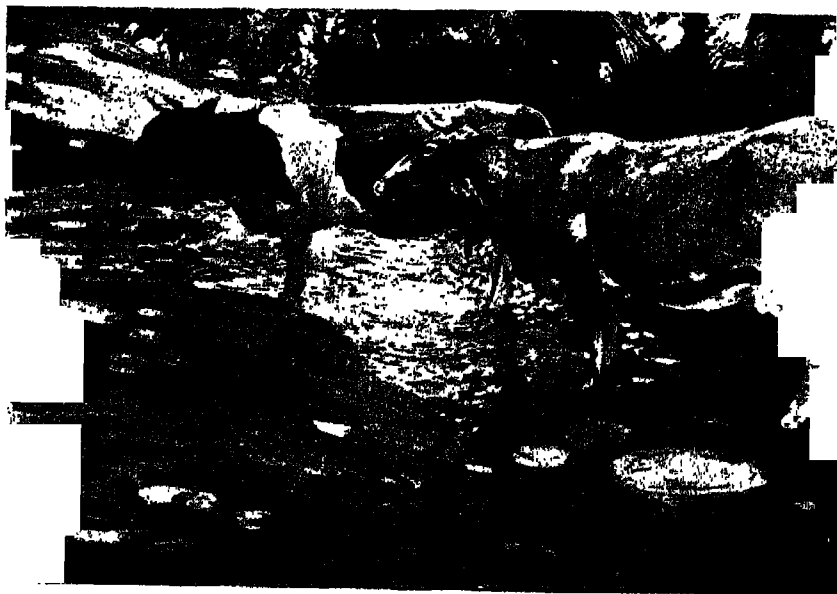
OPPOSITE: ABOVE 'Ned, on the grey, at the top of Zennor Hill, near a hoary pile of granitic rocks'. (See page 100)

44" x 24"

PLATE XI

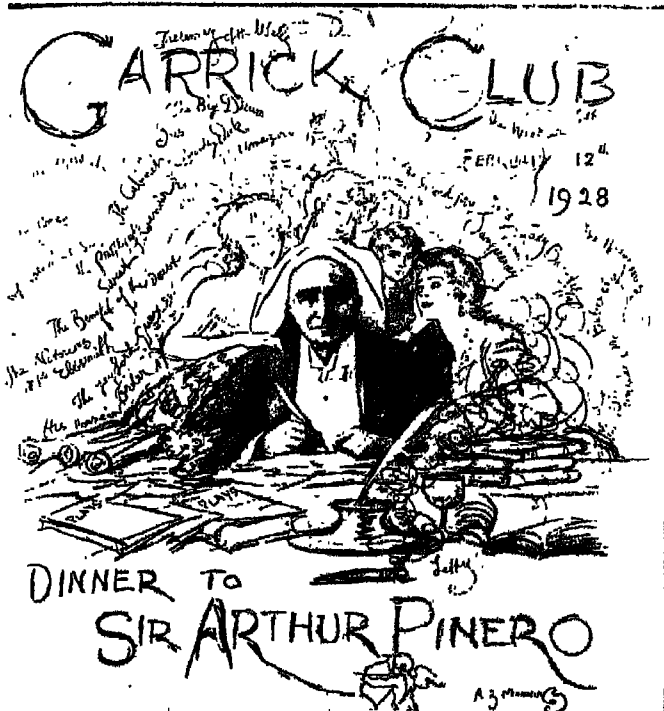


21" x 20"



30" x 25"

ABOVE The Huntsman (tempera). I would like to add that this is an exact portrait of my friend of yore, the brown mare
 BELOW 'Working away at two contented cows standing placidly in the stream' (See also p. 10)



16" x 12"

'Again did I draw the cover for the menu for a dinner given to that famous playwright, Pinero'. (See page 149.) On the right is the menu for the Rowland Berkeley dinner. (See page 149)



PLATE XIV



60" x 40"



30" x 28"

ABOVE My favourite picture, 'A Summer Afternoon' BELOW 'Seeing this forgotten picture of a lad with ponies in a grassy lane, the long buried past was flashed back'. (See page 82)

OPPOSITE: ABOVE 'Horses and elder blossom'. Exhibited at the



In my studio at Castle House, Dedham

XXXIV

THE GARRICK CLUB

THE Garrick Club in Garrick Street – how often have I stepped from a taxi, or walked along Leicester Square and Coventry Street, or up St Martin's Lane, to enter that lofty portal, sometimes to be stopped by a traditional-looking porter, wearing traditional livery, stepping out of his office or box and saying:

'There is a guest (or guests) waiting for you in the Strangers' Room, sir!'

More often have I walked in alone, always to meet friends, many of whom have since passed away, leaving memories behind them. Once, about nine o'clock on a Sunday evening – a night when actors are free – I stopped and listened as I entered the Club. A stentorian voice was calling, 'More brandy'. Passing the dining-room door to hang up my hat, I peeped in. There at the long corner table, where those who act or write plays and books get together, I saw, through the cigar smoke, faces of well-known men – Seymour Hicks, Leslie Faber, Chudleigh (Chuddles), E. V. Lucas, Freddie Lonsdale, Alan Aynesworth and others. . . . The voice calling for more brandy was Alfred Mason's. Who could forget such a scene?

In reflective mood I am uncertain which are the clearer memories – pictures or faces. No other club in the world possesses such a collection of theatrical pictures and portraits as the Garrick. From the street one gets a glimpse of the great staircase, hung with pictures, all in period frames. I have reason to know these pictures. Did not the Club give a dinner to Rowland Berkeley – secretary at that time – soon after the first war, to celebrate the re-decoration of the Club and the cleaning, restoration and re-hanging of all the pictures in the large and unique collection? Did not Berkeley come to my new house and studio in Chelsea, which I had just built, and did he not pose for me in a gentle reverie, with a decanter of port and glasses in front of him, whilst I made a drawing of him for the cover of the menu of that dinner? I still recall Alfred, or A. E. W. Mason, standing there on the great night, making a glorious after-dinner speech, proposing Rowland Berkeley's health.

There, in that beautiful room with its pictures by Reynolds, Zoffany and many more, was sitting a galaxy of genius – actors, playwrights, judges,

barristers, artists listening to the speaker – A. E. W. Mason. And what a speaker! The champagne – the port – the brandy were at work. I still hear one ringing sentence of that clarion voice. . . . 'Childe Roland to the dark tower came. . . .' This, of course, was in reference to the former rich, crimson gloom of the room and Irving traditions of the Club.

But to the Club and its pictures – and, since pictures are its true glory, which has remained whilst faces faded away, let me tell of the rooms upstairs and down where the collections are hung.

Each room recalls memories of happy gatherings; of evenings that have come and gone; of anticipations of feasts to follow, small or large; the pink gins, the sherries beforehand; the late talks that wound up the night. I see each picture in the lobby beneath the stairs, where members gathered for dinner; one in particular I know so well – the Portrait of Macready, who wrote his memoirs.

I have reasons for remembering each picture on the walls of the large smoking-room, for when I was on the Picture Committee did I not re-hang that room? In my own mind I call it the Clarkson Stanfield room, for a masterpiece by that great marine artist occupies one wall. I know of no finer painting of the sea and no better sky. The canvas is more than six feet square, and on the right, in the bottom corner, in the wash of a wave, is an admirably painted piece of wreckage, with the artist's own inscription on it, telling of his presentation of this noble picture to the Club on such and such a date. The mere mention of Clarkson Stanfield's name warns me that several chapters would be needed were I to heed thoughts which come uppermost when looking at that picture or this. I set down first fleeting thoughts before suppressing the rest. This artist of sea and ships, storms and skies, was one of the small coterie who were Charles Dickens' intimate friends. He was one of the select company to hear the first readings of *The Cricket on the Hearth* and other Christmas stories: often walked with Charles Dickens across Hampstead Heath to The Spaniards. But to the pictures.

One of the best portraits in the Club is in this room – the portrait by Sir William Beechey of John Kemble, the actor, brother of the immortal Mrs Siddons, whose name – forgive me straying – comes to my mind, and brings before me Gainsborough's famous picture in the National Gallery: the finest portrait of a lady ever painted – that of Mrs Siddons.

Opposite the door of the smoking-room is another door leading into a small dining-room – a perfect place for a merry party, with its pictures, its atmosphere, even to a silver ship; so full of memories of dinners given, all over too soon; nights which happened between the two wars, before the final blow of rationing in the last. Again I ask myself: which are the clearer memories, pictures or faces? I see a group of chosen friends around me as I press a bell by the side of the mantelpiece.

'More sherry,' I am saying to the attendant who answers its call as the sound of conversation grows.

I see Edmund Gwenn standing there, after the port and brandy, a bowl of punch in the fender to keep it hot; I see the whole bowl going up in a blaze of blue flame. Alas! that actor of actors has succumbed to the films; he has disappeared to Hollywood. Only at Christmas do I know that he is still alive, when, without fail, a pudding reaches me from California, with his love. But I must call a halt to thoughts which come too quickly, for there is the staircase to ascend, which we see from the street – a thickly carpeted staircase with its walls hung to the ceiling with pictures to be proud of. Then there are the card-rooms – still more pictures, most of them conversation groups by Zoffany, de Wilde, the Dance brothers. Now for an interruption. . . .

Happening to look out of the window of this room where I am writing, I see on the lawn a baby rabbit that has somehow got into the garden. Now it sits up on its hind legs, its ears pricked; and I wonder where it got in the violent storm and downpour last night. Without its mother how does it know what is good or bad for it to eat? . . .

But to the Garrick . . . to the morning-room – the most beautiful room in the Club – my favourite room. When I have artist friends to dine, this is where we foregather.

'There you are,' I always say, 'there's a picture,' pointing to a large portrait of an actress by Francis Cotes.

There is, too, another smaller, full-length of Pope – not the poet, an actor – painted by Sir Martin Archer Shee, poet-president of the Royal Academy. In a large glass-topped table by the wall are laid precious relics and mementoes of David Garrick and other great actors.

Sitting at ease with friends in the morning-room, with its quiet, green-toned walls, hung with pictures, looking at Sir Joshua's portrait of Sheridan, the longer we looked at it, sipping the excellent dry sherry, the more elevated did our minds become.

'Here's to Sir Joshua and his noble sitter,' we would say before going down to dine.

If our appetites were right, the sight of the cold dishes set out on a table at the far end of the dining-room would bring our uplifted minds down to earth again, from pictures to smoked salmon, potted shrimps, hams with paper frills, cold joints, and a score of other things. Seated round the circular table in the corner we were set a puzzle by that pre-war menu, which put us in doubt as to whether we should eat cold food or hot. So excellent was the wine list that we hesitated too long; but a decision had to be made.

Being artists, the faces of long-dead actors gazing down at us from the walls challenged us to forget the food and look back at them. The wall at the opposite end of the room was hung with pictures by Zoffany; on a long side wall, conversation pieces by Clint.

Yet another dinner do I remember in that room – a dinner given to that famous playwright, Pinero. Again did I draw the cover for the menu. – 'So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.' The mere thought of Pinero brings

memories of nights at the theatre. Mrs Patrick Campbell in 'The Second Mrs Tanqueray'. I now remember a large picture which I had forgotten, a picture by Solomon J. Solomon of Mrs Patrick Campbell as Paula Tanqueray, that used to hang at the top of the staircase at the Arts Club. There was another famous play – 'His House in Order' – famous among many, their scenes gaining beauty from the old footlights. I see a dimly lit drawing-room on the stage. I see Mrs Tanqueray in a yellow gown, sitting on a settee beneath a lamp with a lacy yellow shade, her face a picture of dark despair. I see another scene in similar lighting in 'His House in Order'. Enough of these memories.

There are two more rooms in the Garrick, one with late Victorian paintings, known as the Guests' or Strangers' Room, notable to me for a small bronze statuette of Thackeray standing on the mantelpiece, and one particular painting – the last portrait of fourteen others in the Club of Munden, about whom Charles Lamb wrote in one of his essays as the man 'who made London laugh'. The best small full-length portrait in the whole Garrick collection is of Munden in large cocked hat and green coat, by de Wilde – probably it is one of the best small full-lengths of the period in the world.

Near this room, with its Victorian furniture and pictures, is what was known as the supper-room. No longer is it used for suppers; we live in a fast-changing world. Even in the twenties, when I became a member, the room was open for playgoers after the theatres were closed. I ask myself if I am dreaming or if I am keeping to the truth, when I say I have seen several men – enthusiasts, first-nighters – eating eggs and bacon or kippers, drinking pints of beer, discussing the play. . . . Memory goes on. . . . Not only was this used as a supper-room, it was also used for private dinner-parties. Here were held the circuit dinners; for me they always seemed to be of the Northern Circuit who gave them. They may have been called dinners, but they were grand carousals.

Edmund Gwenn was once sitting on my left. At one end of the table was the Recorder of Sheffield, trying to sing a song about The Night-soil Man.

'Alfred,' said Gwenn, 'there is only one way to drink champagne. You take your tumbler-full, twizzle this stirring thing round in it, let it settle and swallow the lot down. Then you can feel it inside you and it starts you off for the night. Be sure you wait until you have eaten the fish – then do it.'

The Recorder was still singing how –

The night-soil man he does what he can,
He rings his bell of warning.

'You're not singing it right,' we all shouted.

'Then, damn it, gentlemen, I'll sing it again,' said he.

After the tenth time we all agreed that he was doing it in a much more

dramatic style. Those were the days: the days of Gilbert and Sullivan; the days of the music-hall, which, alas! was already giving way to the films.

'Are you doing anything this afternoon?' asked that dear soul, Leslie Faber, when he met me one day at lunch.

'No,' said I, 'why?'

'If you come with me after lunch to the Tivoli, I'll show you why. I'll show you why the stage will not be able to stand up to films, my lad.'

And with this famous actor I found myself in a front seat of the upper circle, laughing until our sides ached, and the whole audience too laughed and laughed without ceasing; for it was a Charlie Chaplin film – 'The Gold Rush'. Who having seen it could ever forget it? Who has beaten Charlie Chaplin at making the world laugh? But, then, who has beaten dear Leslie Faber when he was acting in Somerset Maugham's play 'The Letter' at the Playhouse, or with Yvonne Arnaud and Ronnie Squire – another Garrick member – in 'By Candlelight' at the Prince of Wales? Could any film, I ask you, compare with those successes 'Show Boat' or 'Yellow Sands', when Cedric Hardwicke became the rage, and when he surpassed himself in 'Christopher Bean' at the St James' Theatre? Which reminds me – that I had gone to the theatre to book seats for that play . . . the box-office attendant advised me to go down and choose my own stalls. There on the stage was Priestley's 'Laburnum Grove' being rehearsed, Edmund Gwenn giving orders.

'What on earth are you doing here, Teddy?' said I.

'Oh, getting ready for the next show,' said he.

I know no play funnier than 'Christopher Bean', and what acting was Hardwicke's as the doctor, with his trouser-ends in bicycle clips! What a performance he gave in 'The Apple Cart', 'The Barretts of Wimpole Street', 'Tovarich'! The stage will outlive films.

Which plays come back the clearest across the years? There were so many. Somerset Maugham – 'The Circle', 'Our Betters'; Ronnie Squire in 'The Breadwinner', stamping on his top hat, giving his family something to think about; Galsworthy's 'Loyalties' and 'The Skin Game'; the Irish Players in 'Juno and the Paycock' and in 'The Whiteheaded Boy' . . . Then the wonderful little play 'Jealousy' at the Fortune Theatre, with only two characters on the stage, Mary Newcombe and an American actor.

What compares with the anticipation, the tuning-up of the orchestra, and folks taking their places, before the curtain rises?

Let me see once more before I die 'She Stoops to Conquer', and yet another and later, almost forgotten, play by a long-dead and forgotten playwright, Charles McEvoy's 'The Likes o' Her'. And now, in mind, I am in a large, dilapidated house in Bath – Charles McEvoy's. His mother keeping house. He was a spendthrift – a queer genius. The family in cold, cold rooms. . . .

'You can do nothing for him,' said Ambrose, the painter brother.

Never do I see the ageing Lord Chancellor today but I am reminded of

days long before the first war, of Ambrose McEvoy's large dream-portrait of young Jowitt. The artist's first attempt at portraiture with candlelight added to daylight – a worthy picture belonging to the Tate Gallery. I see Ambrose McEvoy yet, hear his queer voice breaking from soprano to bass . . . a good man to ask to a dinner-party. An original genius with poetic sense. On rare occasions was he one of my guests at Garrick Club parties in the little room where Gwenn set the punch on fire.

XXXV

PAINTING IN WATER-COLOUR – AN UNWILLING PORTRAIT PAINTER

I FORGET many things and remember few. Water-colours, which were so enjoyable and exciting to do when I threw off the shackles of oil-painting, must not be forgotten. The Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours had been my friend in the past. My first works shown in London were hung there, and yet in the early twenties I forsook those galleries to be elected a member of the R.W.S. – the Royal Water Colour Society.

For years I had tried to send six works to the R.I. Later in life I continued to do the same at the R.W.S. For a time I went strong, and sold my work there while the post-war boom lasted. At length the yearly changing over from one medium to another became a tantalizing, and almost unbearable, interruption to painting large pictures. Unable to live two lives at once, and with only one pair of hands, I gradually gave it up.

The water-colours were laid aside, and boxes, brushes and paper still lie in a large cupboard in the studio waiting to be taken up once more. O foolish artist! 'The night cometh when no man can work'!

My best water-colour, after 'The Piper', was called 'Days of Yore'. Standing in the centre of an imagined scene outside the White Horse, I myself am singing a song: a girl playing the accompaniment on a guitar; the other drinkers in the picture, like myself, are full, happy and carefree, as we often were in the 'Days of Yore'.

I now recall how the secretary of the R.W.S. wrote asking me to come on Re-touching Day and alter the position of a dog's nose in the picture, which the Hanging Committee thought was too close to another's dog's behind, which it was smelling. Strange to say, they insisted on this alteration to a most natural incident. How foolish and silly! Think of all the pictures by Hogarth and Teniers! The painting was bought by a Mrs Baird, whom I have never met, although she has kindly loaned the picture to exhibitions.

Once during the boom of the early nineteen-twenties I had a record year at the R.W.S. All my pictures were sold, the highest price being four hundred

and fifty guineas and the lowest two hundred. Reggie Hunt, the good secretary, assured me they would never sell at those high figures, but they did.

My own horses and stablemen were used as models in each painting, with the exception of 'The Blue Habit', as I called it, for which my wife sat on her favourite mare, Kismet.

I refrain from writing more of this at the moment. Too many past memories of men and horses and happy moments with work going well are coming back to me.

To return to commissions that I painted of Masters of Hounds, huntsmen and the rest, although I complained about having to do these, it was through them that I could afford a stable of horses to paint; and I did paint them.

Always seeing endless subjects about the place, able, whenever inspiration – or the mood – came, to have any of the horses out and posing for a theme, I did not forget that commissions brought the money which paid for it all. Moreover in those days wages then paid to grooms and stable-lads were nought compared to the pay of professional London models, and my stable hands were my models. But again I stir up further memories of truly happy times that are gone beyond recall; of weeks of work, using men and horses all day, making pictures out of doors, ending up with a late afternoon ride and sleeping under my own roof. I regret that I am unable to show here the work done at home. It has never previously been photographed, as were the Academy pictures and commissions.

So far I have recalled the painting of some portraits on horseback; also certain racehorses. Yet I have failed to give readers my true feelings regarding this 'Branch of the Arts' – to give it a good-sounding definition, which in the end began to pall. If I have harped on this subject before, will readers please forgive me?

In my own judgment, many of my pictures of this kind were failures and disappointments. There is no excuse, although I offer excuses. My first is that I am one of those artists who wants to paint pictures. The tone of a day, the light – grey or sun – on things, on horses – people. Worse than that, I long always to sit by a river and paint. . . . As I write this, my thoughts are away to a river-bank, where I am wondering at the beauty of the yellow lilies lying on the still surface among their flat leaves. Do we ever think of these lovely miracles of a river? Were it summer-time, I would go straight down to the water's edge and stare afresh at the golden cups, the leaves glistening in the sun, patterned against dark reflections from trees opposite – but to my commissions to paint horses and people.

My prudent self would argue, 'Why shouldn't an artist, if he calls himself one, make a good picture of somebody on a horse?' To which the more venturesome self replied, 'But life is short, the English summer will be gone in a flash!' If in winter, the same bold self would say, 'Your own horses are clipped all ready to paint and your men here; do your own pictures and let the portraits go.'

Looking back, I see myself opening a letter – a disturbing omen to the start of a day. Somebody wanted to be painted on a horse. If it were a Master of Hounds I was less unhappy. One reason for the distressful opening of these letters was that although I did not wish to accept a commission, conscience would say, 'Don't refuse it! You may live to want the money!' Remembering there was a slump (this was in the later twenties and onwards), I argued with myself that it was foolish to refuse, and so would leave such a letter unanswered for a while. On second thoughts, with fresh hopes of doing a better picture than the last, I would accept the job.

Another reason for my aversion to equestrian portraits was the difficulty of doing them. Maybe I am excusing my inability to cope with the upheavals – or shall I call them uprootings? – for they seldom allowed me to get into a groove of quiet work at home.

The professional portrait-painter has only his sitters to deal with, in whatever lighting he poses them in the studio. A painter of equestrian portraits has to begin with the portrait and figure, with the right seat on the horse. 'It's just his seat – or it isn't his seat,' says a friend. Then comes the horse, then the sky and background. I ask myself, 'Shall I paint the horse on the move or standing still?' But all this can be decided if and when the actual portrait is done, which I must get to my satisfaction first. A good likeness gives me impetus to rush ahead and attack the rest. For me, the portrait of the rider was the easiest part of the picture. Nine times out of ten I could do it in two sittings, and at the most three.

I see myself in somebody's house at dinner, after a fruitless effort to get a face to my liking. If I take wine to forget that face turned to the wall in the library or cloakroom, then tomorrow I shall not be any good at my work, and so I sit, sober enough, taking just a glass or two, with dull care perched at my back all through the dessert and port. As my host and sitter talks about a hound, I am disconsolate over his face, which I am watching – thinking the while, 'By God! tomorrow I'll scrape it out, and get you right in the morning, if it kills me; then I'll be ready for the port and brandy too!'

What a life! The mere righting of a nose in the picture and I am cheered and seeing my way towards painting his breeches, his seat, his boots, his horse and everything that is his.

Remembering all there was to do in these equestrian portraits, and that I often received less for them than the average portrait-painter was paid, that the weather and other conditions under which I worked made achievement almost impossible, I soothe my conscience and say that I hope I earned the money I was paid for doing them.

Only yesterday a cable came from America to say a lady was ready to bring her horse over with her if I would paint her on it. My answer was: 'Sorry, unable to do it.'

I read in various reviews the same expressions about my first book being racy and all the rest of it. Believe me, dear reader, unless a painter tried to

smile, he would burst into tears of despair. Despair lurks between many lines of the book.

You may remember how the war was followed, as most wars are, by a boom in all things, which gradually died away as the nineteen-twenties drew towards the thirties. The boom in picture prices reached records. 'Pinkie', a full length by Lawrence, was sold for seventy-four thousand guineas. An American dealer paid fifty thousand pounds for a head-and-shoulders portrait of the Duchess of Sutherland by Romney. Whilst cunning men were giving these prices for old pictures, other sorts of men were giving big sums for pedigree cattle.

How well I recollect staying with a wealthy friend who had given what was then a top figure – two thousand pounds – for an imported Friesian bull; a magnificent animal. I had brought some large canvases with me – not for painting commissions for my friend, but with the idea of there being a chance of painting some of his fine grey Percheron horses.

One morning we had the bull taken out. Seeing the heavy, slow-moving, black-and-white colossus led across the field was more than I could bear. The same afternoon, with the sun getting lower, I was at work on a large canvas. I still recall the picture of the placid, docile beast passing by with low, ominous roaring – which was friendly talk – and slow, rhythmic movement, led by the attendant with a long pole fixed to a copper ring in its nose. Beyond, as a background, the simple English landscape – hedges, fields and hedgerow oaks, not yet hacked down.

This, being a picture of a bull, a labour of love on my part, it was not easy to dispose of. Only three years ago – twenty-four years after painting the picture – did I sell it at the Academy. It was bought for the Leverhulme Art Gallery at Port Sunlight. There it has at last found a permanent home in one of the best collections of English Art in the country.

I was reminded of another painting I did, during the same visit, of one of those grey Percheron horses. This, too, was a labour of love. When opening an Exhibition at the Graves Gallery, Sheffield, two years ago or more – or was it during the occasion when I received an honorary degree as Doctor of Laws at Sheffield University? – there I found the painting of the Percheron, and was proud of it. Memory fails me, but I think a dealer bought this picture in the first instance. On the morning before the ceremony at the University, John Masefield, our Poet Laureate, who also was receiving the honour, went with me to see the Graves Gallery. We ascended in the lift, and the first room we entered was hung with an exhibition of queer works by Paul Klee which must have been passed on from the National Gallery, London, where they had been on show. The Poet Laureate had seen nothing of the kind before, and his puzzled, baffled expression made me laugh so loud that I was unaware of the Director's arrival on the scene.

'My dear Wheatley, what on earth are these doing here?' said I.

'Oh, this was my assistant's idea,' he replied, but the assistant said it was the

Director's idea. Whosoever idea it was, the room was empty – not a soul there to see the Klees.

Alas! these digressions; to resume.

My wealthy friend, who was farming in a big way, not only had a Friesian herd, he also went in for Gloster Spot pigs. When I was there he had just purchased a boar – or was it a sow? – for a huge sum. I did not paint the costly Gloster Spot, but wrote a poem on it instead. Here it is; may it lighten these dull, dreary, heavy pages.

THE GLOSTER SPOT

A pig with spots was up for sale –
For sale as a Nineteenth lot.
He was just a pig with a curly tail,
And they called him a Gloster Spot.

His blood was blue, and little he knew
He was worth his weight in gold;
On a certain day the bills did say
This pig was to be sold.

The news it travelled both far and near,
It travelled both east and west;
For Gloster Spots were scarce and dear
And Gloster Spots were best.

The news was posted far and near,
It laid on every plate.
It reached the ear of a Haughty Peer
Whose breakfast hour was late.

He'd meant to shoot with his old papa,
He was such a capital shot.
But he cried, 'God bless me, bring the car,
'They're selling a Gloster Spot!!'

The news it sped to a man in bed
Who never had slept a wink,
He cried, 'What, what! a Gloster Spot!!!'
And his eyes went blinkity blink.

A millionaire with money to spare
Who wanted to be a Knight,
Was sure that he would very soon be
If he bought that pig outright.

'The Gloster Spot is the nineteenth lot,
To be sold at half-past three;
I'm going to pot the Gloster Spot,
Whatever the price might be.'

So he caught the mail, and reached the sale
And bought the Gloster Spot.
Said the auctioneer, 'We'll give him a cheer
For this most expensive lot'.

The Haughty Peer he didn't appear,
His chauffeur had lost the way,
And the man in bed he kept his head
And never got up all day.

One more instance. Long ago here at Dedham I painted a stable-lad as a whip in scarlet, on a grey mare, just outside this very window of the room where I am sitting, against a background of trees; part of the old Wellingtonia came in. Every grey day he sat there on the mare whilst I determined to paint the whole thing just as I saw it. 'A Fox for a Hundred' was the title; the size forty by thirty-six. Though badly hung in the Academy, my reward came on Varnishing Day, when a sculptor friend, Ledward, took me to it and said:

'You've painted a horse in the round; I could model one from it.'

Mind you, this was not said after lunch, but before!

The picture, however, remained unsold; even its title failed to attract a buyer, and years later I sold it to a dealer for half the amount I would be paid for painting a portrait on horseback.

Various paintings were always in my London studio, but those who came to pose for their portraits, sitting high up on a wooden horse, seldom looked at or bought one. It was their own face in the mirror or on canvas that they were interested in. There were exceptions – one when Mr Pulitzer of New York, after approving of an equestrian group of his children in the Highlands, said:

'What do you want for that gipsy picture?' pointing to one on an easel, and he gave me a cheque for that and the group of children. The other was when Bill Astor, sitting for a picture of himself with the Oxford Drag, saw my design for the drop-cloth of the Chelsea Arts Ball and bought it and also a landscape.

My large Chelsea studio. Scene, a sitter on the wooden horse in a scarlet hat, white breeches, boots and all complete. Myself at work; he watching himself in the mirror and adjusting the cock of his hat:

'How's it going?' he asks.

'Grand. Keep your head still. A little more that way; whoa!'

Let me hope for perfect sittings under perfect conditions in the next life. Already I am picturing nude Amazons on rearing horses with flowing manes and tails. . . .

But to regain raciness and keep to facts; after this last war there was, for me – in spite of rationing and a shortage of luxuries – another boom in pictures.

Everything I had with a horse in it was sought after. At an Edinburgh auction a hunting scene had sold for well over four figures. The man who bought this – a determined Scotsman: a Glasgow art dealer, Ian MacNicol – came to London and bought from me.

‘Have ye got any more at Dedham?’

‘Scores,’ said I.

To save packing, which was then difficult, he motored in a huge car the whole way here from Glasgow, he and his chauffeur driving alternately, making the distance in amazing time. He stayed the night, and went off in the morning with a load of pictures, some of them fifteen or twenty years old, having paid me a large cheque.

This was a strange coincidence. In 1919, after the first war, two Scotsmen, the Connell brothers – Jim of Bond Street and Tom of Glasgow – bought an accumulation of my work of former years. Again, in 1945, a Scotsman of Glasgow did the same. MacNicol, like the Connells, was a great buyer, quick and decisive.

XXXVI

ASCOT AND THE PROCESSION

ASCOT. The Ascot Procession coming up the course from the Golden Gates is a beautiful sight – it is unique, traditional, English. In 1925, it was my privilege to make a picture for Queen Mary of the procession crossing the Park.

One morning, not long after we had been in our new home in Chelsea, my wife came back from Rotten Row.

‘Would you like to paint the Ascot Procession?’ said she.

Here was the chance of a lifetime. Then she told me that she had seen Sir Frederick Ponsonby, who had told her that Queen Mary wished me to paint the Procession. It was arranged that I should have every opportunity of seeing it crossing the Park from various points of view on the route. The following week was Ascot. Each morning a Daimler, with a crown on the front, called for my wife and me at Chelsea, and we were driven to Windsor Castle, first of all to see the horses harnessed to the carriages – outriders and postilions mounted. As soon as the whole series of empty carriages with outriders between each was in order, I was away in the car to a vantage point in the Park, to watch its passing.

In the days of Edward VII – before horses had given way to the Daimler – the Royal Family and their guests got into the carriages at Windsor, the Procession doing the journey from Castle to stands at a trot. In those days horses, whether belonging to King or commoner, had to do work which kept them fit. The royal horses were mostly Cleveland Bays, a good English breed now practically extinct. For some years the horses have only drawn the empty carriages at a slow pace across the Park to what is known as Duke’s Lane, where the King and Queen, Royal Family and guests step from Daimlers into carriages. From there the route of the Procession led through a portion of the Park to the Golden Gates, and up the course, so that the horses arrived fresh and with action. For all that, on a hot day I have seen horses unharnessed with sweating flanks, being washed down and dried in the stable yard after the arrival at Ascot. But to the Procession.

Arriving at the place of vantage in the Park, I got out of the car and watched the cavalcade coming at a slow trot in the distance. I had chosen this spot

because of the groves of heavy-foliaged trees, and, farther away, tall stately elms, and ancient oaks dotted on the wide, undulating park.

Nearer and nearer came the Procession, a long, glittering line of moving scarlet and gold. Two scarlet-coated outriders on white horses were in the lead; next the King's carriage, drawn by four greys; then came two more scarlet-coated outriders on bay horses. The next carriage was drawn by bays, followed by more outriders on bays, and so the Procession of ten carriages went by. One may well imagine the length of it, with outriders between each carriage, and outriders bringing up the rear. For me the glorious part of this Procession were the colours of the royal livery worn by the postilions – too magnificent to describe. Short, tight-fitting, dark-blue jackets with rich frontage of gold braiding, gold belts, scarlet, gold-braided sleeves, black velvet caps worn over short, white-powdered wigs, tight-fitting white leather breeches, and boots with flesh-coloured tops. Above all, the gorgeous display of large red rosettes on either side of the horses' heads. These lovely rosettes gave an indescribable beauty to the whole Procession. 'Red rosettes, red rosettes!' I repeated to myself all the time as I sat in the car, speeding away, taking another short cut to where the chauffeur, who knew the Park and route, advised me to go and wait again.

The next passing seemed more magnificent than the last, the carriages coming between a succession of trees, which threw their shadows across the road. How shall I write of the beautiful movement of the two leading grey steeds as they came along, ridden by the outriders. One of them, a perfectly white picture horse with vigorous action, getting on in years, had been given to King Edward VII as a three-year-old by the Tsar of Russia. It was a Russian *troitsky* horse, the centre one in a team of three. No outrider's horse heading this Procession could ever have beaten this wonder. The outriders wore silk hats with gold bands and cockades, scarlet coats with gold braiding, white leathers and boots with flesh-coloured tops. The chauffeur so managed that I should be stationed at three different places to see the passing of the Procession.

Although it is a long time ago, I recall the wide-stretching vista of the Park, the sound of hoofs on the turf, the swinging movement of the horses' shoulders against their collars, the glitter of gold braid, of silver mountings on the harness, the rise and fall of postilions and outriders as they rode along through the sunlit landscape.

After leaving Duke's Lane, with the King and Queen and Royal Family and guests seated in their respective carriages, the Procession assumed its right look. Parasols, ladies' hats and dresses gave a fresh gaiety to the scene. Also on either side of the royal carriage were two mounted gentlemen of the Royal Household, in top hats, black morning coats and tight, striped trousers strapped beneath their boots – a warm job on a hot day!

Seeing the carriages passing from Duke's Lane, I found it difficult to concentrate, to see my motif, to be lost in it, and yet to remember to lift my top hat as Queen Mary gave me a kindly bow.

The scheming chauffeur worked it so that I was at Ascot to see the Procession arriving up the course.

Another day I was at the back of the stands getting a closer view of the fretful horses, halted beneath the stone arches, as the King and Queen, the Prince of Wales and Duke of York got out of the carriage. I watched the other carriages arrive in turn, and, last scene of all in the large stable yard, dismounted postilions, sweating profusely, taking off their caps and steaming wigs. I saw the horses unharnessed, washed, scraped and cooled down if the day were hot – an unforgettable scene for a painter. The graceful lines of the tall Victorian landaus on C-springs; the medley of men, horses and carriages; a brilliant confusion of colour, movement and glitter – one of the last remaining glories of the past.

Last year, if I remember rightly, there were either three or four carriages. No high stepper, in his pride, to replace the grey horse from Russia, which, alas! had long passed away.

During those four days my mind became so full of all this brilliance, glitter and activity that it was difficult to decide which, out of all that I had seen, would be the best arrangement for a picture; not only of the Procession going to Ascot, but also of its return home through the long ride to the Castle, where many people waited to see the sight – perhaps the best sight of all: a picture for those great eighteenth-century artists. The low afternoon sun, the lengthening shadows, the tall elms not yet stricken by elm disease, the Windsor people with their children in summer dress, cheering as the King and Queen went by. There was something intimate about the scene. The Queen wore a different colour scheme each day. In my picture Her Majesty was holding a pink parasol and wore a powder-blue silk cape with chinchilla fur collar, and pink and powder-blue ostrich feathers in her hat.

This brings me to the painting of the pictures and to Windsor, where my quarters were in an old hotel near the bridge, which had been built or lived in by Sir Christopher Wren. With me was an American friend from Boston, named Dick Currier, an amateur artist who had stayed with Mr Prince near Boston whilst I was painting in America years before. When I was doing the Ascot pictures, Currier was doing paintings of the colossal bronze equestrian statue of George III, commonly known as 'The Copper Horse'. One of his canvases was a view of the 'copper horse' under a starry sky. I will not relate how we went there on many nights after drinking bottles of Bern Castler Doctor of a certain year.

'How can a man paint the stars?' said Currier, lying on his back on the grass and gazing at the Plough and Orion's Belt.

'God knows!' was my reply.

The huge, shadowy mass of horse and rider against the starlit sky was beyond our conception. . . .

But I must go back to the Hundred Steps, leading up from the town to the Castle, which I ascended every day, week after week, to arrive at the Castle

Mews, and to the rooms hung with State harness, where all the red rosettes were kept in cases. Among the magnificence and splendour of silver-and-gilt-mounted harness my paint-box, brushes, canvases and easels had an unkempt appearance. The paint-stained studio easel looked outlandish in such surroundings.

The weather that summer was truly English, and was at its best – cloudy, bright, changeable. I see myself outside the Royal Stables with Giddens, the leading postilion – not in his glory, but in his shirt sleeves – looking anxiously across the roofs of the town below, away into the distance, saying:

‘Look, there’s some big bits of blue coming. It won’t be dull all the time.’

As the pictures went on, the stable-folk became interested, as they had never been before, in the weather.

The first attempt was of the Procession crossing the Park. How well I remember when this picture was almost finished, when the background had to be done, being driven miles across the Park in a wagonette with two horses that needed exercise – to the spot where I had seen the Procession pass, showing a distant view of the Castle. There I was left, with sketching-easel, box and canvas, eaten alive by thousands of flies, surrounded by stags, also covered with flies – an inquisitive assembly, gazing at low life: an artist at his easel. Cursing the flies, I worked as I had seldom worked before at sky, distance, Castle and Park, until the wagonette came to take me back.

Another try which gave me the idea of the larger one, ‘The Return from Ascot’, was the royal carriage entering the Long Ride. Again I was taken to the spot in the wagonette to paint these magnificent elms. Even two grey horses were ridden there for me to see in relation to the background.

Now for the painting of the ‘ten-footer’, ‘The Return from Ascot’, which was not a royal commission, but an ambitious effort on my part. To make it easier to work out of doors, first of all I laid a nine-foot piece of canvas face downwards on the floor of a harness-room. Then I took a fifty-by-thirty-inch stretcher, with rounded edge so that it would not mark the canvas, and laid it on one half of the long piece, wrapping the other half and top and bottom over the stretcher, fastening them down with a few tacks. This gave me room on the fifty-by-thirty-inch front to place the horses and postilions; the leaders’ noses almost touching the left side, the tails of the wheelers the right.

Scene: the front of the Castle near the extreme left end, by the entrance from the Park to the stables. I am standing, with the canvas already described, in the shade of a tall lime-tree. Giddens, the leading postilion, is holding the near leader. Red rosettes on its head; its neck is arched; silver-mounted buckles flash in the sun. The horse is dappled, with black knees, black hocks, a silvery-white tail. I am painting him in action: one man holds the horse, another is lifting its near foreleg. Another day, and the off horse is standing behind the near; I am painting the pair. As the days go on I have completed the team: leaders and wheelers going by at a trot. I remember a strong wooden box being stood in front of the near-side wheeler, whereon we placed the horse’s forefoot,

to give the action of the trot. The horse pressed his weight so heavily that his foot went through the box with a crash.

'What'll ye be doing next?' said Sands, the postilion, to the horse.

I must record the impatience of the two postilions, Giddens and Sands, at seeing themselves painted in white, both longing for the final day when I would paint the scarlet vermillion of their sleeves, the gold braiding and the rest. This manner of working on a white ground was to give brilliance to the scarlet and gold imposed over it. One morning at breakfast I said to my friend, Currier:

'Dick, the day has arrived, the forecast is safe; I'm finishing the postilions today.'

'I'm coming up,' said Currier.

'Have a look in about twelve-thirty,' said I.

When he came, the proud Giddens was off his horse and admiring his own portrait and scarlet-and-gold sleeves and blue-and-gold coat, his velvet cap – his white wig – his face.

That afternoon I painted the short, fat Sands. His was as good a portrait as that of Giddens.

Another scene: the Royal Academy, the day before the Private View, when, as was the custom, the King and Queen and the Royal Family visited it. I was one of the Council that year. My large picture, 'The Return from Ascot', was the vista picture at the end of Gallery No. 2. I was with Sir Frederick Ponsonby and others in another far gallery when Sir Walter Lamb came hurrying up to say that the King wanted to see me. There, in the gallery, were the King and Queen, in front of the large picture. The King shook hands with me and complimented me on my work.

'You have dealt so well with the green of the grass, the horses are moving,' he said. 'Besides, look at the postilions! I should know Giddens on the leader anywhere, and the portrait of Sands is excellent – the very image of the man.'

To get back to the making of the picture. The horses and postilions being finished on the fifty-by-thirty stretcher, this was taken to the large harness-room and there, with a man from Newman's – the colour-makers of Soho Square – to help me, we unwrapped the folded canvas from the smaller-sized stretcher, straining it afresh on to a larger one which he had brought with him. My next object was the landau. The first morning the two grey horses were harnessed to it and stood out in the Park, so that I could get the carriage in relation to the horses. After this the carriage would be pulled out by one horse, which would be taken away, leaving the landau where I wanted it.

The King, the Queen, the Prince of Wales and his brother were my next problems. Painting the left side of the carriage, the nearest figures were Queen Mary and the Prince of Wales, the most colourful and important being the Queen. So that I could paint Her Majesty seated in the carriage, the parasol, the blue silk cloak, the hat with blue and pink ostrich feathers were sent to Windsor. To enable me to get the figure of the Queen in true relation with the

surroundings, my wife sat in the hat and cloak, holding the parasol, while two scarlet-coated footmen sat behind. As she held the parasol, her devoted dogs sat on the ground, gazing steadfastly up at her. The Queen's photographer from Windsor came to see the picture, the better to understand the exact position of Her Majesty and the lighting and direction of the sun. The Queen gave the photographer a sitting on a terrace in the gardens of Buckingham Palace, thus appearing the same height as when sitting in the carriage.

To find a good photograph of King George was an easy matter. Every press agency had dozens of photographs of the King wearing his white topper. A friend with side whiskers – which gave me a lead for the beard – sat in a grey top hat. The portrait of the Prince of Wales was done in the studio. I borrowed a bust done by my friend Jennings, and put a top hat and collar on it.

It was no easy task painting the curved and glossy body of the landau: there were the wheels to be drawn, the exact ellipse of the perspective. The leading postilion, Giddens, had a son – a student of engineering – who showed me the exact way to obtain the right ellipse. Giddens, who was anxious to see me paint the turning wheels, brought out a jack from the coach-house and lifted the carriage so that one wheel was off the ground, and from time to time he would set it spinning as I painted.

I had misjudged the length of the four-horse equipage. Yet another stretcher was sent for, and a piece of canvas stitched on the right of the picture to give room for the rest of the dickey of the landau at the back with the scarlet-coated footmen sitting in it. The ten-foot stretcher arrived. Again with Newman's man I unstretched the canvas. We rolled it up with the extra piece and took it in a wagonette to an upholsterer's shop in the town, where we had arranged for the piece to be stitched on. This was quickly done with a machine and stout thread whilst the wagonette waited. Again it was rolled up, brought back to the harness-room and stretched on the ten-foot stretcher. On the end of the enlarged canvas I completed the scarlet-coated footmen and the trees and sky.

Going through the hall of the Palace at a recent Garden Party, one of the attendants asked me if I remembered painting him in a scarlet coat as he sat in the dickey of the landau; like myself, he was years older, but looking at him I saw and recalled those same eyebrows and shape of face. . . . But to the picture and its completion. The sky of the picture had gradually grown, and was finished on a day of skies with cloud-formations coming and going. If I remember rightly, the final act took place in my London studio. I arranged with a good, sympathetic soul – a trusty artist friend named Lintott – to come and sit in the studio as I worked. To give him judgment and myself courage, both of us were to drink champagne. In a cupboard lay half a caseful which should have been – but wasn't – finished. A study for the elm-trees which I was about to attack in the picture stood on one easel, and the large canvas on the other.

'Now,' said I to Lintott, 'before the champagne works off I'm either going to muck up the bloomin' picture or pull it off. The shadow side of the elms

behind the carriage has got to be done – finished off, my lad! You watch, and the moment it looks as it should, shout out, "Stop!"

I was soon in action, working on the middle group of elms, which only needed the right touch, using a little copal varnish. Then I went for the other trees on the right.

'Stop!' shouted Lintott; 'leave it alone – you've got it.'

Getting out another bottle, I went and sat by Lintott's side, looking at the canvas across the studio.

'Leave it alone!' said he; 'you'll only spoil it.'

I knew I would, and I left it alone.

To complete the history of the picture, after the Academy Exhibition was over it was shown in the City Art Gallery in Birmingham. I am not sure if it went on to Leeds. Finally it came to rest again in my studio. One day Lord Sandwich, then chairman of the Tate board, and J. B. Manson, director of the Gallery, came to look at a painting, 'A Ball on Shipboard', by Tissot, which I then owned, and which was later purchased for the Tate Gallery. Lord Sandwich at once said:

'What is that doing here?' – referring to 'The Return from Ascot' – 'why isn't it in the Tate?'

The end of it was that Lord Sandwich and Manson were both willing that it should be purchased by the Chantrey Bequest. The Academy Chantrey Committee being in the same mind, the picture was purchased for eight hundred and fifty pounds. Not too large a sum for such an effort, but I was glad to think it was going to find a home in the Tate.

Manson retired soon after that, and was succeeded by John Rothenstein, who, for some reason, has never given the picture a place on the walls. He has his Braques, his Picassos, his Matisses, Klees, Chagalls; but my picture of the King and Queen and the two Princes returning from Ascot has been kept out of sight, year in, year out. At the present moment, as I write, it is hanging in Norwich Castle Museum, where, as Miss Barnard, the director, writes to say:

It is now hanging in one of the galleries where I know it will give a great deal of pleasure to hundreds and thousands of visitors.

I sincerely hope it will.

Here is a letter from George Henry, R.A., after seeing 'The Return from Ascot', hung a second time at the Royal Academy, 1937, as a Chantrey Bequest purchase.

26 Glebe Place,
Chelsea.

7th August 1937.

My dear Munnings,

Please forgive me writing you, but it is with great pleasure that I see justice has been done at last and your picture has been purchased by the Chantrey Bequest.

That a fine artistic work like this displaying such great technical accomplishment, apart from its value as a historical document, should be anywhere but in a National Gallery is unthinkable, and makes me wonder why it was not acquired for such a place years ago at the time of the Exhibition. Best wishes,

Ever yours,

GEORGE HENRY.

(This letter meant a lot to me, coming from an artist who always spoke his mind. I valued Henry's letter and kept it.)

I have been at Ascot this week – 1950 – and have once more seen the Procession. The outriders were on good-looking greys: the four in the royal carriage were handsome too. Only three carriages with bays following, and no outriders with these. I saw them pass the Royal Enclosure, then darted through by the farthest end of the stand to see them come in under the archway, as of yore. The two outriders had already turned their horses, and stood facing the leaders of the royal carriage. As they moved on, turning in a half-circle past me, I felt the same thrill as I had always felt when watching the sight: arched necks, well-kept manes and tails; full moulded, dappled quarters; postilions in blue, scarlet and gold; the swaying movement of the tall landau on C-springs. Then came the large bays drawing away the other empty landaus. Watching them go, I stood thinking what would happen in a horseless world – a new generation – to all the rich, silver-mounted harness, those red rosettes, the landaus of wonderful craftsmanship, when future urbanized multitudes overcrowded the country, hurrying restlessly on to what? The June sun shone on the exquisite blue of the hydrangeas in full bloom. Men in grey toppers, women in pretty dresses, who had watched the arrival were dispersing – going to see the horses in the first race.

My race-card for the Friday lies in front of me; there are pencil notes on it. While waiting for the Procession, I saw a little black-and-white wagtail on the course, darting – flitting here and there – catching gnats and flies for its family waiting in a cosy nest somewhere in the roofs of the race buildings or stands.

One of the tall attendants in a gold-laced hat and green plush coat asked me if I remembered him helping to bring the silver drums, cloths and saddle into my studio when I was painting the Drummer of the Life Guards.

'Don't you remember us putting them on a wooden horse? I was in the Life Guards then.'

All came back to me.

Last night, when I asked a driver bringing me back from the Athenæum if he had been driving anyone to Ascot, he said he had been doing so for two days.

'I was driving most of the night before, so I slept in the car all the afternoon, and never saw a racehorse.'

At Ascot in 1948 I was fortunate enough to see the race for the Gold Cup

from Major Bulteel's stand. Looking down on that vast crowd of people stretching far to the right and left, I realized that of the thousands who go to Ascot, only the few in the stands see the whole race; and what a spectacle on that fine circular course! I can picture it now: Arbar, last but one; then, coming along round the bend into the straight, he closes up, creeping nearer and nearer to the leaders, until a quarter of a mile from the finish he passes them all. A wonderful sight.



XXXVII

THE STUDIO - AND THE ARTIST'S MIND

My present studio at Dedham - a studio brought from Swainsthorpe - stands across a small meadow, with the familiar chestnut-trees behind it. I go through a gate leading out of the lawn - an iron gate through the iron railing, with a chain looped from post to post along the top, dividing lawn from paddock. How often have I walked, morning after morning, over the lawn, through that little gate into the paddock and across to the studio. More pleasant for me than for the man who travels up by train or car, or both, to reach his office in the City - to face his secretary, his letters, his business. Enough is it for me to open the door of the studio - enter and face the problem; the same which has held me since I began painting, since I began to make pictures for exhibitions, as so many do and have done before me. The studio is forty-five feet long, with roof at a sharp angle to the north. Two large skylights with windows beneath are on that side. After all the hunting, after all the race-meetings, the joy-rides round Suffolk, painting people on horseback and winners at home and abroad, I still return to the scene of many happy hours of painting; of many conflicts; of work until midnight on an arrangement, a composition, using the new daylight lighting. Many a winter night have I walked across, steering a line in the black, pitch-dark night, to find the small iron gate. If it is moonlight all is well, but on a 'moonless night' I set my course by the end of the large laurel shrubbery which cuts just half across the bottom left-hand part of the glass doors, where a light is always left for me in that room opening out on the lawn. To the right, above, I see the warm light through the curtains of my wife's room. Thank God she is there - and the dogs.

Out of long habit, I have, through thirty years, grown attached to the place; to locking up; getting to bed and reading until ready to drop off to sleep. Work has often enough kept me awake, but a ride in the afternoon or a walk to the river gives me respite. A man's mind is a strange thing. Artists - poets - writers - musicians need not imagine they alone possess unhappy souls. There are others who suffer torments, who soar up to the clouds a brief while. These respond often to what the artist strives to attain. Stories of great poets, of

artists and sculptors, make good reading; are spread abroad because they are famous. Yet stranger, more extravagant follies are woven in the lives of crazier laymen, of rich autocrats with no set purpose in life, with nothing whatever to do. After all that we read or hear of artists, poets and writers, musicians, mighty or humble, rich or poor, famous or forgotten, there is one thing that is certain – their work has dominated their lives. All their bursts, their escapes, their miseries and delights are interwoven with their work.

What do experts guess, imagine or think about the working of the minds of men who have made books, pictures, music and poetry? In an overcrowded world the numbers of art writers, art parasites, art councils increase out of all proportion to those actually engaged in the Arts; and wondering why artists still continue to strive, let us forget – if we can – those whose living it is to expound on and criticize what artists try to create.

But the scene is changing swiftly. . . . Nature is going to brush aside all mundane thoughts.

It is growing late, a thunderstorm is gathering and strange clouds are forming. Flashes of lightning glimmer above the chestnuts. There was a breeze, and now all is still. Even the birds are silent, except for an occasional clatter from a blackbird.

Ten minutes to nine, Sunday evening, 9th July 1950. Curious clouds; a dull, ominous light of them forming in writhing shapes overhead. A vivid flash followed by peals of prolonged thunder. A blackbird breaks the stillness, clucking loudly; a little wren twitters in the Wellingtonia. More and more vivid white flashes, low down behind the chestnut-trees, over Manningtree; and now the responding, far-off volleys of the storm. The cattle over the road behind the house are lowing.

Never do I remember such a profusion of crimson ramblers on the arches and fences of the lawn. Heavy masses of crimson bloom, crowning the foliage and piled high over the arches, are enriched by the lighting, growing more unreal as the storm approaches. Not a leaf stirs. White roses show light against the dark underneath an arch covered in a glory of green and crimson. Tawny clouds move overhead. The storm will not break here, alas! We need rain.

I have forsaken the studio and all that I was going to write about it. A weird pink light pervades everything. Clouds above are lit up with it. My paper is pink. Dogs are barking back at each other in the distance. A distant train is going farther away, making the same familiar sound that I heard when lying in bed the first night that I slept in this house, more than thirty years ago . . . when I cursed myself for buying it, and was comforted in my lonely misgivings by that sound of a train in the distance carrying people – perhaps to Harwich, bound for the Hook of Holland. . . .

The storm will not happen – all is growing blue and cooler overhead – the pink light fades; ragged clouds are drifting up over the stables on my right. I see horses standing, black silhouettes, under the tree by the rails.

The lightning, the distant rumbling, brings to mind the most violent tempest that I ever experienced. It was at Les Beaux. We had motored - two friends and myself - from Avignon to see my lady friend of yore, my artist comrade of gipsy hop-picking days, who lived in the fine caravan, and who had introduced me to the Romanies. She was living with her dogs in a valley, far beyond Les Beaux. Sir Lionel Lindsay, Waterhouse, an architect from Sydney, and I called there, and went back with her to the little square in the town where she herself owned a café. A terrific storm had been gathering, and broke with phenomenal downpour. Our chauffeur from Avignon assured us we should never be able to get back that night. For ever flickering, with blinding flashes occurring, displays of lightning were followed by loud, deafening peals of thunder reverberating among castellated piles of rock formations in the hills above the town. As the hour grew late, the storm became more intense. At last, during a lull, we said farewell to our English hostess, the lady with her dogs. Leaving her with misgivings, we departed on a journey into inferno. Down steep, precipitous hills; around hairpin bends; in flooding, hissing downpour; our road was shown by blinding flashes that lit the scene. Thunder crashed and rolled overhead, echoing afar among the rocky heights. A wild, dramatic ending to a day out from Avignon.

Before that our journey had been from Spain to Avignon along the Mediterranean by Arles and Nîmes, leaving behind us Barcelona, Tarragona, Valencia, Ronda, Granada, Seville, Pamplona, Madrid. Memories of Velasquez, Goya, El Greco, Toledo; of Roman viaducts, cathedrals with great bells tolling . . . clanging. Wide, sun-burnt vistas of country and rocky mountain ranges. Unhappy memories of starved, weakened, half-dead horses in bull-rings, their off eyes bound and covered by red-and-white-striped bandages; their ears stuffed with tow and tied with string so that they should not see or hear the bull. Memories of heavy *picadors*, encased in padded armour, sitting astride these poor, doomed, patched-up walking skeletons; memories of a half-slain bull tossing the sack-covering off a dead horse and lying down by its victim. Thus, in the familiar attitude of beasts of the field, the bull awaits his fate; a short dagger is driven home behind the poll.

XXXVIII

EPSOM PICTURES

I HAD started in the preceding chapter to write of my studio across the paddock; it was growing late as I wrote. The thunderstorm and its scenic effects came between me and my retrospective reveries – mere wanderings, with no attempt to ‘concentrate’. Forgetting Les Beaux and Spanish bull-rings, let me go back to other days when, with men and horses, I was painting pictures here in the meadows, in the summer of 1929. Pictures of Epsom Races. Epsom – a grand word – stirs memories of months of work following Epsom weeks in 1929 and 1930.

I had arranged for my three grooms to have a day each at Epsom races. Harvey, the stud groom, went one day; Bayfield and Slocombe together another. Thus, like me, they became imbued afresh with the subject; saw the saddling-ring, the jockeys mounting and riding up the course past the tents, the crowd, the stands; to turn again – if the race were a mile and a half – and canter back to the paddock, through the gates at the bottom end, down the dip and up to the start. Then they saw the finish. Seeing these sights, they could better understand what I was after, and take fresh interest in making pictures of things seen at Epsom.

Three of my Epsom pictures were shown at the Academy in 1931: ‘The Saddling Paddock’, ‘Going Out’ and ‘Unsaddling’. For these pictures I used my own horses. The stud was growing – too large, perhaps; among them was a new addition, Chips. No artist could want a better model than ‘Chip’. This was his French name; we called him Chips. He was by Alcantara out of Blue China. Also there was Rose, then a beautiful young, dark-brown mare; there was Peggy’s daughter, Magnolia, a dark grey three-year-old; a bay mare by Glenesky bought in the Newmarket sales as a three-year-old; The Kaffir, a very well-bred dark bay thoroughbred horse. . . . These were used in the Epsom pictures. I must not forget Woodbine, the heroine of many a long hunt on Exmoor. Chips, Kaffir, Woodbine, Stockings, all arrived back from the Devon and Somerset country in May – in fit condition, as hard as any race-horses, their hours of rest being equalled by hours of galloping. I could produce letters written to my wife from year to year in which I have said, ‘Whilst you are galloping day after day, I WORK.’

As soon as the Epsom week was over, picture-making began. Memory is working. . . . I recall how I had asked Mr Nightingall, senior, if I could have a horse or two in the paddock during the week following the races. He said, 'Ring me up'. My wife motored a friend and myself from London to the course, and I worked for a few days in the paddock, with three horses and lads from Mr Nightingall's stables, each lad bringing a set of colours to wear, and thus I began the saddling picture, my friend posing as well. Again the kind Mr Nightingall sent me lads and horses for the 'Going Out' picture. On following days I made a careful study of the old number-boards. Again I went to paint the course and the stands from where the horses are unsaddled. In no other place in the world are horses unsaddled on the course by the stands as they are at Epsom – a classic picture.

'Unsaddling' was my best subject. Here is the scene. The first horse used for this was the bay Glensky mare. Tom Slocombe, in blue jacket with white sleeves and cap, unsaddling, and Rudge, a handyman, who drove the horse-box, posing in one of my suits, with a crimson sheet over his left arm, holding her. Almost in the centre distance is The Kaffir, his saddle being taken off; nearer and in the centre is Chips, with Harvey holding him. Walking across the course is Slocombe again – a jockey in yellow, carrying saddle and weight-cloth. Completing the design, on the right is the young, dark-grey mare as she looked then – Magnolia. I write this on the lawn, with the reproduction of the picture taken from the wall of the library leaning against the stake of a standard rose-tree. My brain grows dull. To my wife, who is darning stockings in the shade, I call out:

'Violet, if I put a bottle of champagne in a bucket of water, would you like a nice, cold glass, because I am going to have one? I need it.'

'Not on your life,' is the reply.

Anyhow, the champagne is in the bucket – Heidsieck '37, a remnant of my Academy store, and taking the great Edmund Gwenn's advice, I swallow a tumblerful, hoping that this will give me a clearer view of the past, even as when I look across the hill at Epsom with a pair of strong glasses. Once more do I attempt to see ourselves in the meadow making a picture of 'Going Out' at Epsom. Chips is the horse in this scene, his jockey a faithful portrait of Slocombe – then a youth, now a steady, thoughtful husband, and father of a boy of over ten. Slocombe would be the same height as Michael Beary, or Childs, or Carslake – no more; not so short in stature or so pygmy-like as the great Gordon Richards (now Sir Gordon). If one of the reasons for racing is to improve the breed of horses, why do dwarfs ride them in races?

Still to digress – when talking to Mr Gilbert, the saddler, in his shop in the High Street, Newmarket, how often have I watched him at work on a little doll's saddle, not to be put on a foal, but on some monster aged five or six, in a handicap of five furlongs. Such horses should do four miles round the Town Plate course. But an artist is merely a humble observer, outside the pale.

Let me get back to my effort, of little account in the racing world – the

picture of 'Going Out at Epsom'. If I reflect a moment, The Kaffir was the dark horse on the other side of the bay, Chips. To get the picture right, I had another fellow in colours sitting on him at the same time, so that I saw the two together. From a panel study I put in the old number-boards, long since gone to limbo – broken up, I suppose; a sad thing to contemplate. How many will recall the old, white-painted framework with tall inner frames which slid up and down, holding the numbers of horses and names of the jockeys? How many thousands of people have looked at the numbers, at their cards, at the horses; and have hurried back to the stands afar off, there being no Tote in the paddock of those days. Thank God, I still have my careful, finished study of those old Epsom number-boards. They appear in my picture of Epsom entitled 'Going Out'. Since the picture was painted, the saddling-ring has been moved to higher ground, altering the direction the horses took as they left the paddock. For me there is no paddock to equal that at Epsom. It is on the summit of a hill. Standing on the lower side, one sees figures of horses and mounted jockeys silhouetted against the sky; others with their sheets being drawn off their backs; groups of trainers, owners, jockeys, all in the bright light of an early English summer, a long, white rail on the far side making a line through the picture – a scene for the artist.

Looking at this, year in, year out, both at the Nonsuch Stakes meeting, the Summer meeting and the August Bank Holiday meeting, I wonder whether there are many there seeing the scene as I do. Do a large proportion of the multitude put their money on a horse? Whilst I am watching shadows cast on the short grass and the look of the sky, and maybe the shape, symmetry and lighting on a horse, are the rest of those around the rails all intent on seven to one or whatever it is? Year in, year out, I stand against the rail – which on Derby Day is almost an impossibility – and always on either side of me do I hear remarks on this horse or that: intelligent remarks, more often than not, from women. The louder, the more nasal, the more drawling the voice, the more knowing and well-bred the speaker. These ladies know all the secrets, seem to have all the tips, all the knowledge, all the lore.

The human brain works in many ways. Mine is wondering how light and how dark are the lights and shades of Sir John Jarvis' colours worn by his jockey. My next-door neighbour is deciding if she shall put half a crown on such-and-such a horse. There is more than that in it. Many are experts, strongly disapproving of a horse's hocks or its forelegs, or even his back. My mental studies have even been interrupted by family secrets told in loud voices, for a moment their minds are turned from horses and betting. And yet we all see with the same eye. My neighbours on the rails are seeing all that I see, without having to think how they should paint it. If their job were to paint it, they would have to get busy during the fleeting moments; and what fortunes they would lose! Art is long, life is short – like the races.

XXXIX

MR STRAWBRIDGE - KIRBY HALL - THE QUORN

SIR FRANCIS GRANT, President of the Royal Academy from 1866 to 1878, had a house in Melton; he hunted from Melton; was buried in Melton churchyard. As President of the Royal Academy he should have been laid in St Paul's, but he expressed a wish that Melton churchyard should be his last resting-place.

It is a pity that more is not known of Grant, the man who hunted in Leicestershire, was President of the Academy, and painted many pictures and portraits.

I have worked in the Cottesmore and Pytchley countries, but know little of the famous Melton district. The only time I stayed in it was at Kirby Hall with Mr Robert Strawbridge when I painted his portrait as Master of the Quorn. He had been Master for only a year when the 1914 war began, and some time in the late twenties or early thirties he asked me to paint his portrait. That is how I found myself at Kirby Hall, where I saw a meet of the Quorn.

Whenever I stayed at a house in a hunting country, where I had a job to get on with, I took no hunting kit. I was there to make a picture, and a picture does not always finish itself. Doing a series of subjects with Major Bouch in the Belvoir country meant months of concentration on work, and I was justified in having a hunt or two. However, when staying with Mr Strawbridge I did have a day out. The day before the meet the stud-groom persuaded me to go and see the first draw.

'I've got a little mare here, the best hack in the world. You can take her out and see the first draw, and if you want to go on you can. She can get you over some of these fences.'

On the night before there was a concert at Melton in aid of some charity. Mrs Strawbridge insisted that I should make an item on the bill with a recitation of my *Tale of Anthony Bell*. How well I remember the evening! . . . Some concert-hall or other in Melton, all the front seats filled with the hunting fraternity: women in evening gowns and all the men in scarlet evening coats.

Lady Ravensdale had sung 'Two Eyes of Grey', with an encore, and then came my turn. I had taken the right amount of whisky-and-soda, and stood on the stage facing a hall of hunting-people and the townspeople, all packed in at the back.

Being pegged up – in the right mood – I began. From beginning to end I was given a wonderful hearing: one could have heard a pin drop. Never have I had warmer applause as I ended on the lines:

But his wife and his daughters they claimed the right
To take him to church on Sundays.

The next morning it was arranged that I should go out on the mare the groom had recommended, and long before the time I was on foot at the scene of the meet. Already numerous cyclists and people on foot were arriving from every direction; then came sightseers in cars; then second horsemen; then horse-boxes. Next were those who hacked to the meet, and finally large cars with people hunting from a distance. At last came the huntsman with Hunt servants and hounds, and took up their position. Having seen the throng gather outside at the meet, I went to the house and saw the gathering there.

Most of the women hunting in those days were still riding side-saddle – some, with silk hats and perfectly cut habits, were shedding their fur coats and getting on to their horses. And what horses some of them rode! Many of them might have gone round the National course.

The time came to move off, and, still on foot, I watched 'the glad throng' in scarlet winding along the road to the first draw. This formidable line in black and scarlet must have extended more than half a mile; there were hundreds. The mare that I was to ride was ready, and I was soon off in the wake of the Hunt. As the stud-groom had suggested, I stayed for the first draw and saw the fox away; but instead of going back to the Hall, I followed. Whether this was an easy sample of the Quorn country I do not know, but there seemed to be a succession of gates which most of the Hunt made for. The galloping between the gates was fast and furious.

About midday I was still out. All were gathered along one side of the Ashby pastures, as the wood was called. Most of the field had dismounted, with second horsemen handing round silver sandwich-cases and flasks. Everybody had not only time to eat and drink, but also to light up their cigars. What a gamel thought I. Not a sound came from the vast woodland. – 'What's Wilson doing?' they were asking. . . .

The Prince of Wales and his brother were out that day, and when at last a fox was found I caught sight of the Prince well ahead in the hunt taking fence after fence. Because of the many gates and an easy fence or two, I was well able to keep about and see what was going on.

I recall how I was leading a charge to a gate, holding my crop ready to lift the latch, a squadron of horse thundering behind me, when one of the field – Major Harrison – galloped past shouting, 'Come on, "The boundary wall is

ahead" ' – quoting my ballad of the night before. He threw open the gate, and I darted after him, followed by 'the charge of the Light Brigade'.

The day ended near Burrough-on-the-Hill, the house where Sir Raymond Greene was living. What a classic country it all was! . . . Hilly, undulating, and, if I remember rightly, foxes were running everywhere in the neighbourhood.

Riding home with Mr and Mrs Strawbridge through the most wonderfully gated country in England – never on a road – I could not help thinking of Henry Alken's pictures of the Quorn Hunt, of the great writer on Bell's life, Nimrod (Mr Charles Apperley). Of the famous Quorn Hunt, where the 'Snob' went so well until his little bay horse was blown; when Dick Christian got into the brook and somebody asked who it was. 'It's only Dick Christian,' shouted Lord Forrester; 'it's nothing new to him.' – 'But he'll be drowned!' exclaims Lord Kinnaird. – 'I shouldn't wonder,' observed Mr William Coke, 'but the pace was too good to inquire!'

It was easy on the way home, walking and jogging our horses across those far-stretching, undulating pastures, to imagine the scene of yore with Assheton Smith, Lord Forrester, Lord Alvanley and the rest of them. As I rode I called to mind the memoirs of that lovely creature, Harriet Wilson, who stayed at Melton with some hunting swell of the period, and her story of how Lord Alvanley (was it Lord Alvanley?), in a hurry to get home early in the afternoon to see her, gave up a hunt, pretending his horse had lost a shoe. Again and again as we rode along, seeing vast tracts of hunting country, from the high ground, my thoughts were of the two heroes – Osbaldeston and Dick Christian – and that punishing match they rode from Dalby to Tilton-on-the-Hill, on the two famous horses, Clinker and Clasher.

I remember reading somewhere how Dick Christian, in his old age, called on his friend Osbaldeston, then living in St John's Wood, and how Osbaldeston had told him that the Clinker and Clasher match had taken it out of him more than the two-hundred-mile ride on Newmarket Heath, which he did in eight hours and forty minutes with twenty-nine horses. What men they were! Never did I look at one of those large hunting pictures by Ferneley without thinking how well that son of a Leicestershire wheelwright could put Leicestershire and the lie of its land on canvas, and I wonder, too, how he accomplished so much work; but then, he did not hunt – if he did, it would be seldom, and in a quiet way. I have heard it said that he helped to put in the horses in some of Sir Francis Grant's pictures of meets.

'How did the mare carry you, sir?' said the stud-groom when we arrived back.

'First rate,' said I. 'We had four nice little jumps. I went through gates all the time.'

'Splendid!' said he. 'I'm glad you had a good day, anyhow.'

I have said that I never took any hunting kit with me on a painting job. All that day I rode in ordinary homespun coat and trousers without chafing the

inside of my legs. This I owed to riding in a good Whippy saddle on a perfect hack.

In the hall Mr Strawbridge picked up an envelope lying on the table, opened it and exclaimed to his wife:

'Look at this, Nita. The Prince of Wales and his brother have asked themselves to dinner. Now what are we going to do? We're alone tonight. Better ring up somebody to meet them.'

It was too late; those who were asked had their own guests and couldn't come. And so it was a party of five – and an interesting party, too; for about then the Prince of Wales was deeply interested in the work and welfare of the Welsh miners, and he talked well on the subject to his friend Rob, as he called Mr Strawbridge. I gathered that the Prince had a soft place in his heart for that good couple, whom he familiarly called Rob and Nita. A better, kindlier pair never lived.

The Strawbridges were an old Quaker family from Philadelphia, and as I write, the painting of his picture comes back to memory: of how he sat in his hunting-clothes in my London studio, and how he got into interesting talk about this thing and that, and how as I worked I thought what a good, sensible honest face the man had. I must not forget his horse – a big, well-bred, curiously coloured bay, a sort of dun, with black points and a light muzzle; the horse was not hogged, he had his mane and forelock. I remember, too, how Strawbridge speculated on his Irish breeding, saying that the colour must have come from some Connemara mare.

Strawbridge had a first-rate stud of horses. There were sixteen of them for hunting, hard and sound, eight for his wife and eight for himself, without counting the odd ones and hacks. The background of my picture was Lack's Gorse. Again, when he took me to see the place, and we stopped on the top of a hill looking across that magnificent country, did I think of Osbaldeston and his field, and of the artists Alken and Ferneley. To stand on that elevated piece of ground was an inspiration to an Essex and Suffolk man. Only a year ago, in the month of November, I was travelling up to Chester to speak at a dinner of the Mid-Cheshire Pitt Club – one of the two last dining-clubs left in England to hold dinners to the memory of William Pitt. Looking out of the railway-carriage window, as I always do on a journey – anticipating with impatience the well-known names of stations that came and passed, each steeped church spire on a hill, like Tilton and the rest of them – my mind was full of Osbaldeston and the Quorn, Dick Christian, Sir Henry Goodricke, Sir John Musgrave, Lord Forrester and Mr Maxe, and the rest of the field, who long ago took fences and ox-rails as they came.

'Riding to a meet across country in Leicestershire is better than a hunt in other counties.' So said one of the hard riders of the day; I forget his name. Had it been my good fortune to have lived there in those days I should have done little work, or, more probably, I should have broken my neck.

One of my last hunting portraits was that of Mr Ernest Heatley, Master of

the Essex Union, on his horse, Conrad. From Leicestershire to Essex is a big drop, but no better sportsman ever lived than this Essex Master, who was eighty-three when I painted him. He was a bachelor, and dwelt with a bachelor brother and three old maiden sisters at Ingrave Rectory. A faithful man looked after him – stud-groom, chauffeur – a man named Charles, who, I believe, even collected the rents from his master's various tenants. It was always: Charles this – Charles that – where's Charles?

Mr Heatley came to sit for his portrait in my Dedham studio, and stayed the night – the greatest sportsman I have ever entertained under my roof. I see him now, sitting in his scarlet coat and cap on a wooden saddle-horse in the studio. He arrived, Charles driving him, at eleven o'clock, and after a small sherry he sat until lunch, and then again for another hour or two in the afternoon. Next morning, by lunch-time, his portrait was finished, and Charles came over in the car and took him back about three o'clock. His stay was short and sweet. Luckily I had some good claret and port at that time, and the Master on the Essex side came to dine with us, and, my wife being away, we had a late sitting, in spite of Mr Heatley's years. It was midwinter, and I had yet to paint the horse. Watching the weather forecasts and the 'further outlook' in the papers, seizing on a bright morning and leaving early, I motored over to Ingrave, and was at work on the horse, Conrad, well before lunch. I think I stayed at the house with his brother and sisters for two nights.

Conrad was housed by himself in a sort of separate building, which was so grown over with festoons of ivy and what is known as Traveller's Joy that I used to call it Conrad's Bower. It looked as though the horse had stood there long ago and the place had been built up around him. Always when I paint a horse in winter the wind has to be dealt with and the direction of it. On the stillest day there is a draught from somewhere. Conrad was led here, and stood there, round this corner of a building, and round that, until at last we settled behind a great laurel shrubbery near the front of the Rectory, and there, in bright, frosty sunlight, I made my hurried painting of the horse. Luckily the two successive days were the same, allowing me to finish the picture.

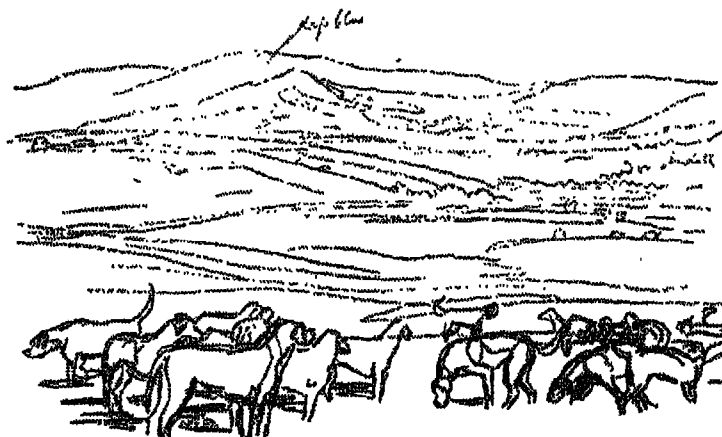
Ernest's younger brother, Arthur, a bachelor and lawyer, was a lad of only seventy-two at the time. Ernest had lent him a new horse, which had given him a fall over some post-and-rails. A good age for a man to ride a new horse over timber! Besides, the horse was a bad puller! Both brothers were always on the look-out for a cheap horse. And what a pair to look at! The lawyer, Arthur, had a clean-shaven, wonderful face. Such countenances are dying out with the passing of the horse.

Before leaving for his office in the City, Arthur's breakfast was always a boiled egg. No ordinary egg, for it was covered with an ornamental sort of wool-crotcheted nightcap which would have given any egg an appetizing and important look. There sat the egg, on Arthur's plate, keeping warm until he came down to eat it and carry it away inside him, to be digested on his journey

in the train to Liverpool Street - to the inexorable office: an office with rows of shelves and little iron boxes on them full of title-deeds, wills, lawsuits. . . .

At length, a tread on the stair, and in the hall. . . . As the door opened and Arthur appeared, the egg perked up, but its little wool cover was outclassed and eclipsed by the sporting cut and style of Arthur's check suit - a suit such as only Arthur Heatley could wear. Then Ernest, serene, peaceful, would come down and help himself at the sideboard.

Both the brothers Heatley had a far-away look in the eye, and I'm sure both are now riding in Heaven, or looking for a cheap horse to hunt with another Essex Union.



XL

LORD DERBY'S HORSES: HYPERION AND FAIRWAY

THE last two horses I painted in Newmarket were Hyperion and Fairway. Hyperion had then been at stud – was it three or four years? I wonder if Hyperion was the smallest horse that won a Derby. Already I seem to have written a lot about painting winners. Here was a winner that had obtained fame at that time – he was already getting many winners and, I believe, topped the list of winning sires; but let the artist speak for a while, and forget racing and breeding.

In the stud-farm where Hyperion and Fairway dwelt, their adjoining boxes, if advertised in a journal read by horses, might be described as a large two-roomed flat, on the ground-floor, in ideal surroundings. No other two horses were housed better or were in the care of better attendants. Chinery, a heavy man of medium height, full red face, with big arms and thick calves, which always looked as though they were bursting out of their leggings, was Hyperion's groom. Cain (I then called them Cain and Abel), a shorter and more wiry man, with a thinner face and a hooked nose, and of smaller dimensions, was Fairway's groom.

Lord Derby had commissioned me to paint Hyperion, the stallion of the day, and I began with him. I asked myself the question, Why should not this be my supreme effort? I had a store of twenty-four by twenty-inch, three-ply mahogany boards, primed with a semi-absorbent white. On this surface I could paint quickly. What a blessing it is to have a nice-looking stallion to paint, to be able to have him out morning and afternoon, knowing that he is not getting bored – on the contrary, that he may be enjoying it! It brings a change of life into his almost solitary existence. Hyperion was a beautiful little horse, not an Araby head; but he was far beyond the average horse in intelligence. Chinery, his man, adored him, and looked upon him as a brother, although when holding forth on life at the stud he remarked that 'when the season was goin' full split, darned if it didn't get on yer nerves – nothing but servin' those blessed mares mornin', noon and night, week in, week out; it's a terrible business!'

Now to come to the painting; for, after all, that was why I went to the stud-farm every morning in one of Chilcott's cars.

I cannot believe, as I sit here writing today, that I ever was so full of determination and energy to attain my object. Days went far too quickly; there were days of rain in between. Many an evening have I returned to my friend's in Station Road and said:

'This weather will be the end of me.'

A weather-glass hung on the right of the front door in his hall. Always hoping that the wireless and forecasts might be wrong, I tapped that glass before going to bed and when I came down in the morning. I began the horse in sunlight, and as this was to be the horse-portrait of my life, I needed sunlight. An artist can always make use of grey days. I painted Hyperion in his box – a box far larger than many Chelsea studios. I painted his neighbour, Fairway, in his box – a beautiful dark-brown horse. No sooner did I become entangled in the tones of a horse in his box, than out came the sun. I believe that I did say, 'Oh, damn the sun!' May I be struck dead for saying such a thing! The sun is life. How well I see that firm, rounded form of Chinery's, with his Rowlandson-like breeches and swelling calves – all true horse-keepers walk out of Rowlandson's pictures – his rubicund face under the sun, his big, bared fore-arms holding the horse.

'Get his quarters a little more to me, Chinery. Whoa! that's all right,' I'd say. Chinery all the time using a long spray – I think it was elder – to keep the flies off.

There is a certain depth and transparency in a well-groomed coat of a horse – bay, brown or chestnut. There is nothing opaque about it, neither is there about a bottle or a piece of glazed pottery. On the surface of a live animal, be it a dog, a horse, a cow, a bird, or even a fish out of water, there are high lights, and when we grasp the meaning of these high lights it becomes interesting. We will take the covering of horses. On browns the lights are cooler, greyer – bluer, if you like; on a bay, less cool; on a chestnut inclining to pinky-grey. On a well-grown horse in the sun these lights are devastating. Art writers, full of conceit, empty of vision, their minds urbanized, jeer at my 'shiny horses', as they call them. They are quite welcome to their Matisse women – to their Braques, Modiglianis and surrealist horses; their outlook is as queer as that of their fancy artists. What would old Chinery or Cain think of their pet pictures?

I was speaking of the difficulties and troubles of horse-painting, which are a hundredfold. A horse never keeps his ears still. A horse at attention, when he is looking at an object, pricks his ears. Strange as it may seem, he may be aware of what is ahead of or around him, but if ever he looks at an object he pricks his ears. But it is reckoned that a camera can do all this: can give a representation of anything – even of a horse pricking his ears. How often have I stood or sat, my study nearing its completion, holding a particular brush, watching those ears, as a horse gazed at something afar off. I watch; there is no

hurry; I am mentally painting the stroke – the horse still looking at whatever it is. I hold my hand – looking at the ear; then I make my stroke.

Observing the horse and canvas almost simultaneously is easier for me, and more instructive, than painting from a photograph. Unconsciously I am learning from Nature.

A picture, after all, is only made up of paints – applied to a canvas. The walls of rooms in which we live are straight, flat-surfaced, plastered, papered or coloured. We hang pictures upon them as decorations – as a pattern. The majority see in them something reminiscent, maybe of landscape, or figures. There is no telling what some of us conjure up in our minds when looking at pictures. So I please myself, hoping to please the man in the street, knowing well that I am trying to achieve the impossible. The result may be some kind of an image to hang before us, and the more it is like the better. . . . This is a mere dissertation.

One day I said to Chinery, 'Why can't we take the horse out of his own paddock? He is standing here and dozing.'

'Right,' said Chinery, 'we'll take him through the yard out into that big empty paddock.'

I almost wished I had never spoken. With Cain in attendance, box, easel, canvas and all, we moved into the new demesne. The moment Hyperion found himself there he was all alive. He began to haul the sixteen-stone Chinery across the field, moving slowly backwards, his head outstretched, taking Chinery with him on the end of the lead. It was no use Chinery planting his feet and sticking in his heels; he was quietly and steadily pulled to the farther end of the field. Calling for help to Cain, his friend and partner appeared and got behind the horse, finally persuading Hyperion back to where we wanted him. Here we were in a wide, empty paddock; more paddocks, mares and foals in the distance – things for the horse to gaze at afresh.

'Why didn't we do this before, Chinery?' I asked.

'I'm sure I don't know, sir,' was the reply; 'there's no reason why he shouldn't stand here now he's watching those mares over there.'

Little does Chinery know what is going on in my own mind. I am concentrating on a mere study of a horse painted upon a twenty-four-by-twenty board. I am still wondering what is the actual colour of the shadow on the horse. But no writing can give any idea of the intricacies, the colour, tones, knowledge of horse anatomy, conglomerated together in the mind of one who is trying to paint a horse. I often think, when looking at an old horse-picture, that the artist had been up against the same problems. For all that, there is no reason why we should not go on. The curse of human nature with regard to the Arts is Progress – always Progress. By all means let us have our wireless, our electricity, our Calor gas. Art is of the mind – a different thing. Art is – or should be – part of life. It balances up our primitive instincts. Painting, sculpture, writing, music come from the brain – from the soul. To take suddenly a cynical turn – to make a somersault – to strike out in what one thinks is a new

fashion, could not be the choice or intention of a normal mind. There is no time in life for him who is dealing with Nature's truths to turn to stunts. After all, a stunt may only be a cloak to hide a man's incapacity.

These digressions carry me no farther, so let me get back to Hyperion in his new surroundings. I have talked about painting a horse's ears. What of his eyes? What of the modelling of his head – of his neck, where the most puzzling things happen in the way of lighting? But enough of all this! As the last thing, let us take a horse's tail! Hyperion carried his like an Arab's. It was thick, with a slight wave; when not in movement, drooping to his quarters, the longest hairs touched the ground. How is a man to paint such a tail? There it is; you have only to move the horse and he holds it out. When the tail of an ungroomed colt at grass is lit by the sun it shines, but the tail of a well-attended horse such as Hyperion, or any racehorse, glistens with health and well-being. All I can say is – let him who can, paint it. I give up; I can no more explain these painting problems that I could dart like a chaffinch with a striped wing from one tree to another. It is easier to talk of the stud, the big barn, the buildings, or to tell of the conversations between Chinery and his mate, Cain.

Chinery was a king amongst gardeners. He seemed to have two principal ambitions in life: one was to see that the forty mares sent to Hyperion were got in foal; the other, equally strong, was to beat all competitors who showed vegetables in local flower shows.

'There you are,' said he one morning before we got to work, holding at arm's length, by the very end of its tap-root, the largest carrot I had ever seen, 'look at that for a carrot! Did ye ever see one to beat it?'

From the end of its tap-root to the end of its green top, which reached the ground, it was as long as Hyperion's tail. This was one of the grand specimens he was sending to the local show that day. Carrots, potatoes, onions, parsnips – they were all going to the show.

'He's bound to get first prize again,' said Cain.

Thinking of the pigs that both of them kept, and all the cattle-manure off the stud, I could well understand the healthy look of those vegetables lying in the baskets – a proof that farmyard manure is the true food of the soil. Putting everything back beats all the artificials. And how much better the food! Not only is the produce of the soil more healthy with that feeding, we who eat those products are more healthy.

There was quite a batch of studies and canvases made at Lord Derby's stud. The principal picture, Lord Derby's own commission, was a portrait of Hyperion with Chinery holding him. Long after that, during the winter, I had it out. The difficulties of horse-painting faded into the background – were forgotten. The arrangement of some trees was worrying me – the design again. And so, however well one paints a horse, a figure, a sky, a picture is not good unless the design is right.

The picture of Hyperion and Chinery was hung in the first room of the Academy in 1938. A half-centre, on the right-hand wall of Gallery I – sad to

tell – it balanced my picture, the same size, of 'Anthony Mildmay on Davy Jones', hanging on the left, half-centre. Both horses in their respective pictures were the same size and colouring, painted in the same lighting. This was just the wonderful, clever and comic sort of arrangement that the Hanging Committee would make. Looking at the wall, I became aware of all my own little ways and tricks doubled, but comforted myself that the Academy Exhibition was only for a few months – that only a few thousand people would see this great piece of matching of a pair of pictures, giving the artist away. In the end each would go to a different home, miles apart.

Lord Derby did not want my two studies of Hyperion and Fairway. That spring I hung them in my own exhibition at the Leicester Galleries. In 1940 they were in the Gem Room Gallery No. 9 at the Academy. After the exhibition was over and the Army occupied Castle House, I took them, with the bulk of my work, to Exmoor. Both pictures were hung in my sitting-room at Withypool, where I saw them every day, and I was as near satisfied with them as I could be. The director of the Tate Gallery, John Rothenstein, whose taste in Art often differs from mine, had written me about Hyperion's picture for the Tate, and, the war being over, he wanted it to go to the Continent with an Exhibition of British Art. He asked if it could be purchased for the Tate by the Chantrey Bequest. I was then back with my belongings in Chelsea, and able to send it in its frame for inspection by the three Academy members on the Chantrey Committee for that year. They were against the purchase. The very next morning a dealer came to Chelsea and bought it for the sum I had asked. This – in my view, my one and only good painting of a horse – is now in the possession of William Hope Collins, a partner of the publishing firm; it hangs in his house in Ayrshire. I would rather that a colour reproduction of this painting had been made than of any of my other works.

Whenever I am at a race meeting – seeing on the race-card the name of some horse sired by Hyperion, the scene in his paddock at Newmarket comes back to me: Chinery holding the horse, and I myself, striving away, trying to paint the picture of my life.

Standing by the rail of a saddling enclosure, I often recognize sons or daughters of Hyperion as they walk round. They bear a striking resemblance in colour and symmetry to their chestnut sire. The head and neck, the shoulder and quarters, even the same action is there.

XLI
ELECTED PRESIDENT OF
THE ACADEMY

ON a December morning during the Second World War while in Withypool I awoke, remembering we needed a load of logs for the fires. At breakfast letters came. One of these turned the calm stream of my existence into a whirlpool. It came from a member of the Royal Academy saying that Sir Edwin Lutyens ('Ned', as he called him), the President, had been ill for months and could not last much longer: that the Academy would soon have to be thinking about a new President. Was I prepared to stand? Here is the letter:

30th December 1943

Dear Munnings,

We should, next December, be faced with the election of a new P.R.A., but alas! our dear Ned is sinking rapidly, and I am told by his Secretary it is only a matter of days.

He has endeared himself to all members by his single-hearted devotion to their interests and to those of the R.A. . . .

The immediate object of my writing to you is to express the profound hope that you may find it in your heart to allow yourself to be nominated for the Presidency.

I believe it is not the Council's intention to canvass members as to their readiness to serve if elected, so that obstacle will be removed. . . .

It is the painters' turn to represent English Art at the R.A., etc. . . .

It is an annual election; you need not feel you will be saddled for a long term with duties that have become distasteful to you. Give us a chance to make them otherwise. Those to whom I have mentioned the question are your whole-hearted supporters.

Yours sincerely, _____

This was an abrupt awakening out of the groove of work in which I was embedded. Aware of the high position, the responsibility of being P.R.A.; reluctant to give up my free way of life; thinking of ceremonies, handshaking, speech-making, dinners, boiled shirts, banquets, I said to the tempter, 'No'.

'But what an honour to be President! There is only one P.R.A. in the world,' said the tempter's voice.

Irresolute, yet full of conceited pride, I showed the letter to my wife.

'Of course you'll stand,' said she; 'but I won't influence you. Think it over well. Remember the tie it will be.'

Yet more irresolute, castle-building, seeing myself already the P.R.A., for a brief moment, I shook off the dream, shying away from it like a horse at a milestone. I was a half-hearted waverer, wanting, yet not wanting to be President. There was only one thing to do – go for a ride and think.

The horse I rode cared nothing about ambitions. . . . On the moor the same long sky-lines. What did it matter whether I were pavement artist or P.R.A.? I thought of Sir Francis Grant, P.R.A. He hunted from Melton in the Shires with famous packs, and painted Queen Victoria in her carriage at a meet of the Buckhounds, famous sportsmen like Assheton Smith, Mr Villebois and many more. He painted large full-lengths of dukes, duchesses, earls and countesses in England, Scotland and Ireland, and yet had time for presidential duties. His was a major case; mine was a minor.

In the afternoon I returned, having settled to stand for election when the time came. In my reply to the letter I asked for consideration and fewer Council meetings if I were elected. An answer came that all would be well, that a deputy would help, and meetings would be fewer.

18th January 1944

My dear Munnings,

Your first letter was a great relief to my mind. It was nice of you to write again. I look forward to seeing your name in the New Year's honours list.

I think the prospects are shaping well.

Yours,

The member suggested that I should come up and attend the next assembly and election of two R.A.s in the near future.

Through snow and ice to Taunton station, standing all the way in the crowded corridor of the train, I got to London, stayed the night with a friend, and went to the Academy the next day. Going up the staircase I saw quite a gathering through the open doors of the Saloon. Augustus John, who never went to elections, was there. Seeing me come in, a friend greeted me, saying he was glad to know I was standing for the presidency in March. Turning to a senior member he said:

'You're going to vote for Munnings when the time comes?'

'No, I'm voting for an artist,' was the reply.

This was wonderful. But before I left I saw there was a possibility of gaining the honour.

The day of days arrived. In better weather, I got to Taunton and travelled in a train more crowded than before, arriving at Paddington to the sound of wailing sirens – a foretaste of war-time presidency. My sculptor friend of yore,

Whitney Smith, who had made my father's bust long ago when we were young, my companion in drives behind the white pony Augereau, gave me a bed in his house in Priory Road, St John's Wood. In spite of his years he was a full-time warden, in dark-blue uniform, with a beret on his grey head. At night, from the roof of a tower on his house, we saw the sky lit with search-lights and bursting shells. The noise of bombs was deafening. It was a raid! My friend took me down to his dug-out in the basement and went out for the rest of the night into the turmoil. Next day he and his wife stood at the top of the steps of their front door sending me off with good wishes.

At the Academy there was a large assembly of members for the election, which was soon over. I was President, and everyone was shaking hands with me. A row of Press photographers with flash-lights were asking the Deputy President to pose with me, hand in hand, smiling like idiots, one at the other.

That night many of us dined in what was left of the Arts Club after its bomb had fallen. Later, as we celebrated the occasion, the warning sirens wailed and the dreaded din of a raid was on. The Club had a sort of strengthened safety basement. As the raid grew intense, we went there; Sir William Reid Dick, a strong tumbler of Scotch in his hand and several inside his body, defied the enemy, scorning to take cover as he leaned against the fireplace in the hall. At 2.30 or 3 o'clock in the morning, with the Underground stations packed, and no taxis, Whitney Smith, who had dined with us, and I walked home to Abbey Road. Up Piccadilly, with fires lighting the sky, through Park Lane, along the Edgware Road, passing burning buildings, flooded streets, fire brigades – pictures of hell. Full of wine, we strode on – the lurid firelight in the sky. A nightmare forgotten in sleep, almost forgotten now as I write.

I was P.R.A., filled with lofty hopes for the future of English Art. Nothing could daunt me. I believed in tradition with the sure knowledge that the great men of the past, like Michelangelo, Rembrandt and all the company of Masters belonging to a great age, could never be surpassed in drawing and design, that in our age we could yet see things as they were and carry on to a future of sound painting and interesting outlook. That abnormal fooleries, distortion – the outcome of disgruntled, cunning, incompetent minds – would be denounced by a Press worthy of England; that young art boys, glad of good, easy jobs on the Press, Art Councils and such like, would wag their beards for the last time on the wireless. Back in Exmoor I was working again, not able to realize what I had taken on. The importunate voice of the secretary reached me in the wilds, warning me of Council meetings. Notices came, announcing elections, assemblies; then selection and hanging committees meaning long journeys to grinding weeks of work in London during war.

Perhaps this letter should also go in:

My dear President,

10th March 1944

I had it in mind to write to tell you how warmly I congratulate ourselves on your election to P.R.A.; it is a great relief to my mind. I regret that my

term on the Council has just terminated and that I shall not be there to support you. *Artists are 'Kittle-cattle'* and need a lot of handling and self-denial.

An immediate necessity, as the printers await the printing of the Annual Report, is your consent to accept the Presidency of the Artists General Benevolent Institution, an age-long tradition of the P.R.A. May I have a line from you, as the matter is urgent?

Later on I should like to know your feeling about membership of the Athenæum. The P.R.A. was one of the original founders of the Club, and is an ex-officio member of the Committee.

All good wishes, and my congratulations to your Lady wife.

Yours,



Orpen's portrait of me

XLII

THE KING'S PICTURES

IN the winter of 1944 there was the usual bad weather on Exmoor, with snow. I had received notice that I was to be knighted in the New Year. My top hat and morning clothes had to be found. These, with all the clothes I possessed in the world, had been cleared with my other belongings and taken from Chelsea to Dedham; when the Army took over Castle House again all had to be moved to Exmoor. Where were the London garments? Found, pressed and packed in a suit-case, they accompanied me on my journey through snow and ice to Dulverton station, and from there in another crowded train to Paddington.

The scene in the Palace was a memorable one. We were all ushered down into a basement, where a row of gilded chairs, from the Royal Apartments above, had been placed along the wall of a solidly built passage-way. Above us, running along the ceilings, were scores of water-pipes and electric cables. A gentleman usher in gentle tones instructed us, as we listened like schoolboys, what we were to do when we went into the King's presence, which was up three steps out of the passage into a small apartment that reminded one of a housekeeper's room. Trying to remember all that the usher had told us – when to make our bow and when to leave after we had been knighted – we seated ourselves on the gilded chairs, one by one, in turn, going to receive his honour.

I should imagine that this was a unique ceremony taking place in a unique war – a war that had stricken the world with fear. There was little romance or grandeur about this never-to-be-forgotten scene below in the Palace. Top-hatted, I walked away with another top-hatted friend who was now a Sir Harry, whilst I was Sir Alfred! Now in the stables, Bayfield always says, 'Yes, Siralfred'; 'No, Siralfred'; 'Quite right, Siralfred.'

In 1945, after the war, the Academy Council were considering how they were to give a truly notable winter exhibition. All the pictures and treasures from galleries and museums had been taken from London and stored for safety in the country. The greatest of all – a private collection – belonged to His Majesty the King. Before they were hung, would it not be possible to show the whole collection to the public in the Academy, this being the only place that could hold them or show them to advantage? The King gave his consent,

and in due course the pictures arrived at the Academy, and were hung, filling every Gallery. What a noble collection it was, and what a success!

This led me, in my excess of enthusiasm, to write a people's full-page article for the *Daily Graphic*, which I believe helped to increase the attendance, and also caused annoyance to some of the more ill-disposed members at a General Assembly, who did not think that the President should write about the Exhibition.

During the Exhibition the King gave a few private parties in the Galleries. Refreshments on these occasions were served in the beautiful large Assembly Room. When His Majesty made his first visit to the Exhibition, he declared that he did not know that he owned so many fine pictures. Hanging usually in all sorts of corridors and rooms in Buckingham Palace, Windsor and elsewhere, they were now a complete Exhibition, on the walls of the finest galleries in the country. What is more, they were hung in the order from period to period.

In my article in the *Graphic*, amongst the pictures that I had singled out as my own preferences, were Reynolds' pictures of Lord Eglinton and of David Garrick, and Lawrence's portrait of the great Lord Thurlow – three masterpieces of English portraiture. Standing one day in front of Lord Thurlow's portrait with Sir Henry Hake, the director of the National Portrait Gallery, I was holding forth upon it and its masterly painting.

'Sir Thomas Lawrence,' said I, 'must have enjoyed doing it.'

'One can see,' said Sir Henry, 'why it is such a successful picture. The artist and sitter got on well together – both of them were good bounders.'

No friend ever painted a more intimate portrait of a friend than this particular portrait which Reynolds did of Garrick. One could stand and speculate upon it in the quiet corner where it hung, near the later and more astonishing piece of painting – the portrait of Lord Eglinton. No painter has beaten it for sheer mastery of technique and insight into character. Lord Eglinton is there – alive, alert. So fresh and direct is the painting that it looks as if it were done yesterday. Reynolds was at his best when he stood back and painted those features – that expression. The colour of the shadow side of the face defies description.

An exhibition of pictures of this quality must have had a far greater effect upon the minds of visitors than we imagine.

It seems that too many things come between the artist and his object today. The eighteenth century and its small population had altered little in its ways of life from a past far beyond it. A change set in after 1820. At first it was imperceptible. Then came the railways, followed faster and faster by too-quickly changing modes and ways of life, with a population increasing even faster. . . . Beautiful architecture gave way to our worst period. Good costume disappeared before the ugliest ever known. . . . Artists are creatures of environment. As the surroundings, so are the Arts. Many of us look back and recall with pleasure the Exhibition of the King's Pictures – a great record of past genius.

Again at the Palace in 1947, His Majesty King George bestowed upon me

the great honour of the K.C.V.O. On that occasion the ceremony took place, as of old, in the State Rooms of the Palace, with wives and people looking on. As the recipients of honours moved towards the King, I was standing near a large fireplace. Against this stood one of the beefeaters in magnificent array. He was speaking to me:

'How are you, sir?' – I stared hard at him.

'Epsom,' I said.

'You've got it, sir. That's where we meet – at the races.'

In spite of his gorgeous costume, I recognized an old friend – a gate attendant – whom I often saw in the Members' Stand at Epsom and other meetings – Ascot – Sandown – Hurst Park. . . .

I moved along and in turn came to the King. As His Majesty hung the ribbon over my neck and fixed the Star, he said:

'Your hand is in a sling. What have you done?'

'I slipped, and sprained my wrist, sir.'

I did not like to confess that it was the gout!

Letter from Sir Raymond Greene on the K.C.V.O.

*Burrough on the Hill,
near Melton Mowbray.
1st January 1947*

Dear Lady Munnings,

Many congratulations on the K.C.V.O. I had been wanting to see the New Year Honours list before answering that very charming letter which you wrote to me. There is no doubt that the very best day's work that 'Mr President' ever did in his life was when he persuaded you to become his colleague – and it is with no intentional flattery I say that his brilliant and successful career is due to your help, advice, companionship. One of the chief pleasures left to anyone of my age is to watch and enjoy the successes and illustrious careers of those that one may claim as friends.

Old Harry Chaplin's advice to you of the 'steel hand in a velvet glove' could not be bettered – I think it may be applied equally to the horse and the human!

I do very little hunting now, but still have two hunters in the stable, and the love of my life is 'a horse'.

With all my very best wishes to you and Sir Alfred for 1947,

I am,

Yours,

RAYMOND GREENE

XLIII

WAR DAYS IN LONDON

WITH my house in Chelsea empty and closed, the Arts Club and its bedrooms bombed, I was dependent upon friends for a bed. The doors of the Devonshire Club in St James' were open to the homeless members of the Arts. Impatient to be back in Dover Street, the Arts Club Committee and its architects got the remnants of the Club patched up so that billiards, food and drink could be had there again, although there was no longer any sleeping room. Drink was the thing that was needed in those desperate days.

It was there that some of us stayed late on the night of my election, and were caught in one of the last heavy bombing raids. Soon after my election the kindly Devonshire Club made me an honorary member – a noble action on their part. I was then able to indulge in the luxury of sleeping in a well-furnished bedroom, all complete with its own luxurious bathroom. Another privilege, I was looked after by a most considerate soul – a valet, whom I shall never forget, called Baker. He was a quiet, unassuming, brave little fellow – an 'unsung hero'. Each morning he was there early, after travelling up in crowded trains from a far-off suburb. Whatever the night had been – doodle-bugs or rockets – he appeared at eight o'clock with the tea for each of us. So much did I admire Mr Baker that I made a drawing of him bringing in the tea, and gave it to the Club, where it hangs in the Bar; I think I also gave one to Baker – I hope I did.

After living in the wilds of Exmoor, amidst deep snow and ice, it was a joy to go up to a large, warm, well-furnished bedroom, where there was even a bureau; to stalk through another door into one's own spacious and private bathroom . . . to place there some well-worn sponge or toothbrush – maybe we have already forgotten the scarcity of sponges during the war – the price of a small one being at least five pounds.

Only a week ago I was seeking for mementoes, and found some sheets of writing-paper with the Devonshire Club's address on the top. Each sheet was filled with writing from top to bottom. Had I already forgotten how, after days of work with the Selection Committee in the Royal Academy, I had sat late one

night in my bedroom, writing into the small hours of the morning, full of the subject of our hopeless sittings and all the pictures passing by us? Alas, I had! Reading these sheets of the Devonshire Club's paper I found it was the following poem, but it was harder for me to trace in my mind exactly when I had written it. Doodle-bugs and sirens, and getting two homes straight, after a war, alone would cause me to forget.

Oh, who can say what toiling hours are spent
 Upon the many pictures yearly sent
 By youth and age to hang upon the walls
 Of this Academy, which each year palls
 Upon the sight of those who hope for better?
 Alas! when shall we break our rusted fetter,
 Which chains us to our ancients in their age?
 When shall we start afresh with cleaner page?

Each spring is still the same. We struggle through
 Ten thousand pictures men should never do;
 And without variation year by year
 The sorry work flows by, all bleak and drear,
 Whilst we, the wise committee of selection,
 Sit hoping, always hoping, for perfection!
 But wearily we wait to stay the flow
 Should some new, budding work of promise show
 To tell us all that Art is not yet dead,
 That genius has not quite for ever fled.
 But nothing comes; no, nothing which may tell
 A break has happened in that sullen spell
 Of murky paintings ever yet increasing,
 Each looked at one by one and never ceasing,
 Until we wake to see the funny side
 As we behold some monster, full of pride,
 Staring from his frame, all full arrayed
 In Mayor's robes, with chain and all displayed.
 Lace at his cuffs, and lace beneath his chin --
 Did I say lace? It is not lace, it's tin!!
 And so he passes on, his eyes upon us;
 Oh, may Sir Joshua's ghost have pity on us.
 Then comes a work in crazy home-made frame: --
 A cross-eyed face; below we see the name
 Of her who painted it, -- a girl of five;
 Her years and all complete, -- it's full of drive;
 And once again we all are now alive,
 As one, with lifted hand, holds up the flow
 To understand the better what a child can do.
 And next, somebody stops a tiny panel
 To find it covered with a piece of flannel;
 The paint still wet -- but see, it's upside-down!
 A spot of yellow on a mess of brown.

We give it up, and wait in expectation
For something which may cause a mild sensation.
Twelve pairs of eyes are suddenly arrested
By a great swollen nude, all heavy breasted,
And for a moment we sit staring there
At folds of yellow flesh and tufts of hair.
Ah! here at last is real imagination
To show we yet are an artistic nation.
Our spirits sink as she is borne away
Crossed out in chalk to show she cannot stay.
So goes this mighty effort, duly chalked,
And thus the soul who painted her is baulked
And his or her ambition fades and dies,
And she will roll once more her baleful eyes
In Chelsea, whence she came in loaded van
From some ambitious student girl or man,
And there she'll face her maker once again: -
Another picture painted all in vain.
And so the paintings pass us day by day;
All hope is lost, and we no longer pray
For one good work on which to place an 'A';
'A' is the letter standing for 'Accepted';
But nothing comes as we had all expected:
And there in galleries 'One' and 'Two' are piled
Portraits of sitters who have sat and smiled.
Still lifes by ladies who have been beguiled
Week in, week out, for everlasting hours
Painting bright marigolds and other flowers.
And all these piles go crossed out and rejected
Whilst we, who have for days sat and inspected,
Get ready for next week, when as a gang
We seize each place of honour, there to hang
Our precious works, all painted by each other,
And bother what may happen to another
Until we feel it might look too suspicious.
The pleasure for a while is quite delicious, -
Seeing ourselves in centres everywhere,
Each room thus gaining a distinguished air!
And when we've hung ourselves, we hang the others;
And we're as happy as a band of brothers,
Excepting that in every hole and corner
There glares at us a chilly, timely warner, -
A work by some old member, hale and hoary,
Who never ceases in his trail of glory:
Yes, there they are, reminding us that we
May one day paint a most untree-like tree
That they must each be hung where one and all
Will surely spoil the making of a wall.

But there they wait, green tree and sky and fen, –
These warning paintings done by older men.
Yet do we hang them, never mind how shoddy;
Regardless of the scorn of everybody;
All deaf as posts to warning drum that rolls;
Heedless of the voice within our souls.
Ahl were we each one honest in his heart
Then what a true academy of Art
We e'en might be; and having done with trash
We'd rise again and then go back to smash
This rotten bunkum known as modern art;
And so once more resume our proper part
By doing that which we should surely do
And give the good old public such a show
That all who come to see the pictures here
Will go on talking of them through the year
Until we come to 1946,
With more new hangers with more common tricks;
Thus will our precious system always stay,
And Art will grope along its same old way.

The discovery of this poem or ballad recalls those awful nights with the doodle-bugs roaring over London, and even over St James – too loud and near to be pleasant – nights when a few of us sat late, one of the company always being Professor Ortel from Montreal, an old resident in the Club. More than once did we sit on, talking, drinking; talking about anything rather than the war; trying to forget the calamitous explosions of doodle-bugs and rockets bringing sudden death to people. At last, thinking that all would be well – that no more raiders were coming – with a last drink as a night-cap, we would go up to our rooms and get to bed. No sooner were we there than we heard that dismal, haunting cry of the sirens. Sleep was impossible with the noise of anti-aircraft guns. Was it better to stay in bed, or to get up and get into some clothes? Putting on trousers and coat, I would go out to the landing of the Regency stone staircase to find the professor and several others. Here we hoped we were safer, and, whilst hoping, we heard in the distance that infernal sound of an approaching doodle-bug, drawing nearer and nearer on its fateful track, until its noise was so loud that we were sure this time we were for it. It roared over the roof above us like a tractor, then, as we listened for a few more seconds, knowing that it had passed over St James, over Piccadilly, its hideous noise suddenly stopped. Still listening, we heard the explosion . . . some poor folk had met their end.

Not only were there doodle-bugs. Often when silence had fallen over the great city, when slumber was at its deepest – maybe at two o'clock – in the small hours – without warning, one of those terrible rockets would fall with a sound that could only be compared to a random shot of a gigantic rifle, the din

of its unearthly echoes dying away in a shivering stillness which, after the explosion, seemed more intense:

And the stillness gave no token,
And the silence was unbroken. . . .

Again did one think of the folk who had met a sudden end.

Still do I recall an Academy Council meeting in the beautiful Council Room, with its painted ceiling, its portraits of members going back to the days of Sir Joshua. I am sitting in the crimson, leather-covered presidential chair (an old, grandfather-shaped chair), Sir Walter Lamb, the Secretary, on my left, reading the minutes of the last meeting; on my right Vincent Harris, the deputy President and Treasurer, the Keeper and the rest of the Council sitting round the table. With a glass screen behind me, my back to the fire, I am facing the two windows looking out into the beautiful courtyard, so that I can see a space of sky. There comes the warning cry of sirens. . . . Lamb goes on reading the minutes; we sit, some of us smoking cigarettes, listening to Lamb; we find ourselves apprehensively looking one at the other. Of what is each one thinking? We put up a pretence that we are not thinking of doodle-bugs until we hear one of the brutes approaching . . . and still Sir Walter Lamb goes on with those endless minutes. The aerial tractor roars over Piccadilly; it misses the tops of the buildings – passes on – we are saved. What of those where it fell, for its clangour ceased with an explosion a very few seconds after?

How soon we forget! Did we not see the desolate spaces where houses and buildings once stood, it would be difficult to believe such things ever happened.

Another scene. During the distressing occasion of selection and hanging, I am again with my friend Maurice Codner, at his house in Temple Fortune Hill, seeking a peaceful week-end. No such thing! A night of sirens, of riotous anti-aircraft fire, and lights in the sky. We are sitting up late, a bomb too near to be pleasant had shaken the house.

'Come out on the lawn and let's see what's going on,' he exclaims.

We go through the studio doors and look up at a sky effect which Turner would have painted had he been alive. When the excitement and sky convulsions have once more died away into an ominous silence, we go to bed. But an April morning does not bring the peace I longed for. Another enemy, in its way worse than doodle-bugs, is attacking. Alas, it is the gout! So bad is it in my knee that I come downstairs a step at a time on my posterior, using two sticks to walk as far as the studio. Showing friendly concern, my host says:

'This won't do, Alfred. Let me ring up a friend. He's not my doctor, but he is a great enthusiast on things like gout – rheumatism.'

'For goodness' sake do!' I reply, and the doctor friend answers that he will be along at twelve o'clock.

In anguish I lie upon a rug on Codner's lawn until the doctor arrives. I hobble into the sitting-room to take a closer observation of this saviour. Being an artist, I can see that here is a man who knows his job.

'Can you get me a pint mug of hot water?' asks the doctor.

Into this he puts a big teaspoonful of bicarbonate of soda and a quantity of glucose, and tells me to drink it. Then, taking down my trousers, I lie face downwards on the couch. With a sharp, deft stab he injects something near my lumbar region. In twenty minutes or so I am able to walk, and with many blessings and thanks on my part, the kind man leaves us. What a scene to remember!

That same evening Codner and I walked through Kenwood Park the whole way to Highgate to dine. We dined very pleasantly, regardless and forgetful of gout and doodle-bugs, returning home about one in the morning, as before, on foot. A most wonderful doctor and a most wonderful injection! More than once since then has he treated me, and with words of good advice as to diet and exercise. Exercise! What it means to us all! I walk and ride miles. . . . But what of a burst with pleasant company at the Club? . . . 'Yes, let's have another port!'

The next day we called on my sculptor friend, Whitney Smith, in Priory Road. We were in a taxi, nearing his home, when we noticed that the windows were out of all the houses we were passing. I can see my friend Codner now, with horror-stricken look, as he peered through the taxi window, myself peering from the other side of the cab.

'Good God! all the windows are gone!' said he.

Whitney Smith's house stood on a corner. As far as I could see, all along the road, the windows were indeed gone. Not a pane of glass was left in the sculptor's house where we pulled up. His wife, Rachel, came to the door.

'Doodle-bug,' said she. 'It fell in West End Lane, and Ted [Whitney Smith] has gone there with other wardens looking for bodies. One was the house of a doctor friend. Come and see the studio' – and going through the hall, down two or three stairs through a covered way into the garden, she ushered us into the place where for years her sculptor-husband had devoted his life to his beloved work . . . not making subterfuge stunts, distortions or manœuvres to catch the eye of nitwit writers, but striving always to reach a goal – never to be attained.

His were not stark, droll figures with round knobs for heads. No profound mind could speculate with any intensity upon such honest efforts. The sculptured figures he made had noses and eyes, and even ears. What is more, they stood upon feet, and would not weigh forty stone if they were alive. Alas! there was no sign of guile, dropsy or elephantiasis . . . the lovely arms and shoulders were modelled in vain. The greatest of our Sunday critics – Sunday being the day when art-minded folk sit up and take guidance – has sought too long and too often for chicaneries and queer shapes – foreign, maybe, to his own make-up and desires – ever to be able to judge a candid, straightforward piece of work delineating something of Nature, however poor or good it may be. He

and his followers – parasites – dwell and gush upon meaningless pieces of perversion. Why? It were better to ask the editors or owners of newspapers.

I remember reading, some time ago, a rich, effusive splash by this greatest of Sunday paper critics, full of superlatives, upon a little show of modern French paintings – they weren't pictures – held in a little gallery in a little street. The clever writer, stuffed full of plagiarisms and duplicated art-lore wisdom, started off his effusion, as near as I can recall, something like this:

'When an English artist begins a picture, he takes it very seriously. . . .'

Continuing in that vein with more adjectives – which are his forte – the writer at length reached his point.

'But', said he, 'when a French artist begins a picture he is full of fun. . . .'

Then he went on to pour forth eulogies on things probably forgotten next day. However, he had given the little gallery a boost-up.

A pity the owners of newspapers do not go – taking with them the Art notices – to these strange shows of fireworks about which their critics write. . . . But they never will.

'Find me a critic,' says one. 'I'll engage him.'

But a good writer – a second Ruskin – will not be forthcoming. And why? Because England is not allowed any longer to be a home of the Arts. Art doesn't matter. In utter ignorance, both on the part of directors of galleries and the public, Chagall, or rather Marc Chagall, and the like are acclaimed as the noise. Reynolds, Gainsborough, Lawrence, may well turn in their graves.

Ivor Brown, with his English name – a sane Englishman if ever there was one – once said in conversation at the Garrick Club:

'It seems to me – as regards Art critics and English painting – that we may rave all we like about the Old Masters up to Gainsborough and Lawrence, or to Rowlandson. . . . After that, even Victorians like Frith, Millais and the rest were all wrong. Today, it seems to me, it's a crime if any of us dare look at a representational piece of modern painting. As for the 'poor devils that do it – God help them!'

But to return to Rachel and her husband's ruined studio. Indeed, that devoted pair had fought their war at home; this was the second devastation his studio had suffered. Six years have gone by since then. My wife and I have long been back in residence in Castle House and Chelsea. One wondered, on seeing the sculptor in ordinary clothes, if he had ever been a warden, so far off seemed the days of dark-blue wardens' attire. He had rallied from set-backs, resumed his work; but he was feeling the strain. Heart trouble followed. I am writing this in the summer of 1950. A week ago the brave Rachel, his sole nurse and sole aid, whose family name was Pitt – a good name – had a stroke and passed out, leaving my sculptor friend alone. Luckily, his only son, in the consular service, came home. Ringing him up only yesterday, I found that an unmarried sister-in-law was keeping house for him. It was Kitty – now, like

ourselves, none too young. I remember her long ago, when she was young, dark, charming and tall, with little round kiss-curls at the ears, and ear-rings. In 1904 an artists' party gathered in a studio near the very spot where the doodle-bug had fallen in West End Lane, and from there went on to an Academy *soirée*. In those days there were tons of strawberries and buckets of real cream. There was claret cup, champagne cup – and champagne. I have a vivid recollection of the return of the party to the West End Lane house, in which, long ago, John Gulich had painted the large water-colour 'Violin Concerto', housed now, with many others, in the cellars of the Tate Gallery, replaced by flukes and quackeries.

But to the party. Dear, provocative Kitty was wearing a pale blue silk evening dress with flounced skirt sweeping the floor. I can see her now as she came down the stairs to where we were having a last whisky and soda, begging someone to unhook her dress at the back. We all helped to do it – and now she is housekeeping in Priory Road in the place of Rachel, who in those early days always went to artists' parties and dances dressed as the Belle of New York, looking just like Edna May. To digress. Only a fortnight ago, at Ascot, I went through the doorway from the enclosure on to the lawn near the grand stand. Sitting on a seat beneath the trees, listening to a scarlet-coated Guards' band playing airs from 'The Belle of New York', I hummed these lines to myself, thinking and recalling the words:

She makes the Old Bowery,
Fragrant and flowery
When she goes out for a walk.
She's as soft as a snowy-white dove,
She's simply created to love.
The fellows all sigh for her,
They would all die for her,
She is the Belle of New York.

When Whitney Smith and I were young and single, I used to make rare visits from the country to his studio in Circus Road, and I met there a simple-minded, short, thickset, raw young Scot from Glasgow. His name was Reid Dick, and he was Whitney-Smith's assistant. Neither of them had a bean; how the master was able to pay the assistant I never knew. Long afterwards, at an Academy election, Whitney Smith was runner-up in the ballot with Reid Dick, who was elected by one vote. Again did the same thing happen, Whitney Smith losing by only one vote to another man who got in. Fate was against him. More than once was he in the running after this and never did he become a member of the Academy. When one thinks of the abortions that have been, and are now shown in the Sculpture Room at the Academy, one could weep; one feels that something is wrong with English Art.

Last week, when in London, I paid a hasty visit to the Academy. Passing through the Octagon Room, to No. 7, to look at some complications in frames, I saw, facing me, as large as life, on a pedestal, an outlandish nude, a figure of

a swollen, gorged, porky, deformed female. For a moment I halted in front of it. I thought many things in that brief moment: of the dignified courtyard down below where I had passed by the statue of the great Sir Joshua; the stone steps; the glass doors leading into the black-and-white-tiled entrance hall, with its painted ceiling; the design and architecture of it all. Upstairs were those beautiful galleries; and now - this foolish piece of obscenity stood gaping at visitors as they entered. There at the turnstile was the honest, English-looking Hubboks, in the dark-blue-and-red Academy livery, with brass buttons. There stood the commissionaire below in the hall; behind me was another porter in the Academy livery. The building and its attendants were all part of a long tradition, yet this stupid monstrosity was shown there.

'What do you think of it?' said I to Hubboks, as he sat on his stool by the turnstile.

'Not much, Sir Alfred,' said he; 'I keep my eyes off it.'



A war-time study of the late Sir Duff Cooper in an after-dinner argument

XLIV

PRESIDENT'S DINNERS AT THE ACADEMY

THE happiest hours of my presidency were spent sitting, with guests and friends around me, at those dinners which I used to give in the Assembly Room. This room, with its painted ceiling, its pictures – one of which is a large Constable landscape, insured for forty thousand pounds – is an ideal place for a dinner-party. I always preferred to sit on the side of the table away from the fire and facing the mantelpiece. Behind me was a choice specimen of the Sheraton period – a large, unblemished sideboard of that peerless age of furniture design. Each of us sat in a mahogany armchair – a pattern known as Nelson chairs. My delight was to go in before the guests arrived and see that Hubbocks had put the pink or crimson tulips in nice tight bunches in the silver bowls; to look at and admire the Georgian silver, the candlesticks, the salt-cellars, and all the objects that go to make a dinner-table look as it should. Since the days of Reynolds, each man on becoming a member has presented to the Academy a piece of silver with his name and the date engraved upon it. There is a large set of silver dessert plates, all in the same pattern, with members' names engraved upon them, and when dessert was served, and the port went round, it was a pleasant diversion for us to look at our plates and to see who had given them – each plate arousing further interest around the table as we gave out the name upon it. Mine might have been given by John Sargent, my neighbour's by Joseph Farington, another by Landseer or Etty; others by men whose names are sunk in oblivion nearer or farther away.

One could take up a tall Georgian candlestick and see the long-dead donor's name engraved on the base. I am sure that members who sat at such dinners, gazing on a piece of silver, have indulged for a moment in retrospective thought of what the man who gave it was like. Their pictures were known, but they were not. And so, with the port going round, the night passed on.

A very old custom with the Academy – alas! now fallen through – was that of the incoming Council dining with the outgoing Council on New Year's Eve. The urge to fraternize, dine and drink late afterwards was stronger in the old days than now, although Victorians living in St John's Wood had no motor-cars and taxis, only broughams and hansoms to get them home after midnight.

Today this dining date has been changed because we feel that New Year's Eve is an impossible night to get away and be absent from home. Those fortunate Victorians, who wore spotless, starched shirts, white ties, and very tall collars, and hobnobbed around that table more than fifty years ago, drove down to the Academy to the sound of a tinkling hansom bell, or in a one-horse brougham, leaving behind them a well-run, well-furnished house with servants to wait on them.

What is it like today? A member may find himself in a queue at a vegetable shop, if his wife is ill; or even buying a bloater, or answering his telephone, his front door, letting in the electric-light man to read the meter. Under such conditions I see no likelihood of great masterpieces being achieved. There are those who will argue that great masterpieces were not achieved in Victorian days when servants answered the bells. But what of Frith's 'Derby Day', and pictures by Millais and Holman Hunt? Besides, there never were many masterpieces created. Those who painted them were mostly waited on by assistants and servants. Rubens and Van Dyck are noble examples of great men who were well served. Vermeer's wife would have had a servant or two, although we are told the same old story of his bakers' bills by men who write yet one more book about him, using the same source of information as all the rest.

Perhaps one of the gayest of parties that I had the honour of giving in this room was when I invited various men who had written letters to *The Times* about the Picasso exhibition held in the Victoria and Albert Museum at South Kensington. They were clever men who wrote those letters, and with another guest or two to match, it was a great evening. This dinner was on 21st February 1946. The guests included Mr Attlee – who I found was a reader of Tennyson – Lord Camrose, Lord Brabazon, the Lord Mayor, Sir Cyril Asquith, Sir Malcolm Hilbery, Sir Alan Lascelles and others. Academy members included Professor A. E. Richardson, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, Stephen Gooden and William Dring. Of the letters received afterwards – as a pleasant reminder I give one from the Honourable Sir Cyril Asquith:

*Brooks's,
St James Street,
25-2-46*

Dear President,

I don't feel I've been sufficiently grateful to you for one of the most delightful dinners (indeed almost the only super-square meal) I have had in six years. I thought I was contracting 'flu at the time, but the company and the fare overbore considerations of that kind.

If I'd felt well – and correspondingly loquacious – I might have bored you with a longer speech. It has occurred to me since (this is, I believe what is called *l'esprit de l'escalier*), that a full-blooded defence could have been put up for what is now regarded as a leprous heresy – that of 'representational' painting – the precise reproduction of a thing as it is. In that connection I would make one point with which I think you will agree.

While I entirely concur with your impatience at the employment, by

critics, of terms applicable to *one art* when discussing another, it does seem to me that some *principles* (as opposed to jargon) apply to all. If so, why is it that in poetry, the exact transcription of a sensation into words is regarded as admissible, while in *painting* (according to the men we dissent from) it is regarded as ninth-rate?

In poetry, the only instances that occur to me at the moment are two:

(1) about insomnia, — Keats' 'Isabella': 'we put our eyes into a pil-
lowing cleft, and see *the spangly gloom froth up and boil*' — A perfect
evocation of a sensation we've all had; and all agree that, poetically it's
excellent.

(2) Tennyson (God bless you and Attlee for liking him!) of the eagle:
'The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls.' Again, an *exact* reproduction of
what anyone seeing the sea from a height sees, and, I think, bloody good.

Then, why condemn a picture which does the same? Those Dutch
interiors of Pieter de Hooch, in which every bit stands out clean and crisp,
and one can almost feel the rough texture of the bricks, seem to me things of
delight. On modernistic doctrine, I suppose they stand condemned as
puerile and contemptible.

It doesn't follow that a picture which presents objects with exact fidelity
is bad. But the house of art has many mansions, and an honourable place
can, I feel, be filled by purely realistic presentation.

There seems to me no tenable theory behind the Picasso stuff. In one
picture one can see the back and front view of a woman presented simul-
taneously — instead of having to walk round her, and see them successively.
But is this a triumph of art? It seems to me at best a labour-saving device,
acceptable to the lazy, but unrelated to art in any sense in which art is worth
while.

My pen has run away with me — I wanted merely to say how much I
enjoyed myself, and to thank you once more.

Yours sincerely,

(signed) CYRIL ASQUITH

PS. — Please forgive the parti-coloured inks — my pen gave out. Klee's
pictures seem to me to resemble, not pictures, but a sample-book of patterns
of linoleum.

Another dinner, more hilarious and bohemian, was given to the Hanging
Committee after we had struggled through some thousands of pictures,
hanging less than a sixth of those sent in. We deserved such a night. The
outcome of that hanging was almost a record Press, caused by the differences
between members of the Committee with regard to the hanging of Merton's
picture of three delineations of the same beautiful lady on one canvas. This
was the third year in which I gave a lunch on Press Day to which the editors
or their representatives were invited. After lunch, on making the round of the
galleries, all were lost in admiration in front of Merton's picture, except the
scornful Hannen Swaffer. And what of the highbrows? In spite of them,
crowds flocked in, day after day, so that the attendance was second in record
only to the year 1927, when the *Daily Mail* boosted a picture by Mrs Dod

Procter, called 'Morning'. The Press is indeed a useful factor in the stress of life.

It is a pity the Press does not give now and then more space and serious consideration to the Arts rather than to the birth of quadruplets. On the centre of the third page of a leading daily newspaper today is a large picture of a lady with a vacant face, holding a cup of tea in her right hand and a saucer in her left. Beneath is a caption: 'Mrs . . . - she wrote many "pathetic" letters.' This picture reaches nearly half-way down the page. Note - that the Press needs more newsprint. Below is still another long, full-length photograph which may teach many readers how to put a portrait outside its frame. The girl's head cuts above the top margin, and her right foot, which she is just putting forward in a walking action, is lapping over the bottom margin. Underneath this is a caption: 'Rosemary . . . , she kept house for her father'. On the very top of the page, in large letters: WIFE TEASED HUSBAND ABOUT BALD HEAD. IT LED TO DIVORCE COURT. On the right-hand side of these two pictures the whole column extends from top to bottom of the page with headings half-way down: (1) Secret Marriage. (2) Belittled. (3) Cruel Letter. A third of the way down the paragraph the husband whom the woman teased, or rather the husband's head, is floating in space like the moon in the sky, with no sign of a neck or collar. Underneath this floating head are the words: 'Mr . . . '

But to the presidential dinners; should there be an excuse for one I asked the Secretary to send out invitations to those I wished to ask. When the acceptances came in, he and I thought hard, wondering how, in rationed days, we could make the best of it. It was not easy, being allowed only a miserable course or two, and although we may be forgetting it, proper wines were hard to get. The sight of that table with the silver candlesticks and red shades, painted ceiling above, and a nice fire burning in the broad grate, made up for what we could not find in the way of food and drink. How well I remember when I decided on a dinner - thinking of the dour rations - saying to Lamb:

'Well, Walter, what shall we give 'em?'

'Oh, well,' he would say thoughtfully, 'we might give 'em turkey.'

And if it was turkey - turkey it was. Anyhow, we could always get grapes, which reminded us of Bacchus.

As a digression - looking back and thinking of various spreads - round-the-table parties - were I asked which was the best - the perfection of merry-makings that I can remember at once I would say, 'In the early twenties, when I gave an April lunch-party in Norwich to a reunion of my old hunting friends.'

How I arranged it I do not recall; it was a splendid party. About thirty men sat down - some of the best in Norfolk. Two masters of hounds, a brewer, a lawyer, a doctor, a veterinary or two, and the rest good, staunch farmers of the right breed.

The party was held on a Saturday in April in a private room on the ground

floor of the Maid's Head – somewhere near the entrance to the courtyard. Bunches of primroses were ordered for the table, and magnums of Bollinger rested in the pails. We met at 12.30 for one o'clock, when we sat down. We carried on until 4 p.m. We drank everyone's health, and each responded in turn. The white table-cloth, shining silver, primroses, gold-topped magnums and good faces around the table made a picture. 'The scent of primroses, or April sunlight in a room, brings back the Saturday scene in Norwich afresh, and I find it impossible to refrain from writing: 'Those were the days!'

Suffragettes in the Academy

Let me return to the Academy, not to a dinner party but to a dramatic scene in the galleries before the First World War.

It took place on opening day, when the rooms were crowded.

I was with Laura Knight and other artists looking at one of her paintings when suddenly we heard crashing blows and the falling of splintered glass – then sounds of hurrying feet in the next room. Rushing through with the crowd, we were in time to see a frail woman with a small hatchet or chopper, striking viciously at the already slashed portrait of Henry James by Sargent. She was seized and surrounded. By then the room was crowded to overflowing. Whilst the commotion was at its height again there came the crashing and breaking of glass.

A general stampede followed, and in the adjoining room there was another determined woman hacking away at a painting of a beautiful nude by George Clausen called 'Primavera'. There were shouts of rage and disgust at this vicious act. I can see the great slashes in it now as I recall that remarkable scene.

It took many men, it seemed, to restrain the energies of these suffragettes.

Henry James' gashed face looking out of the picture was a comic sight had it not been so serious. In much less time than one would believe, the pictures which had appeared to be damaged beyond repair were restored and again hung, and it was interesting to try to trace where the holes had been. There was not a sign of them.

That same year, a few weeks later, a suffragette threw herself in front of the horses at Tattenham Corner and was killed. I remember being somewhere on the rails near the finish. This tragic event at the moment, amongst that great concourse of people on the Downs, was a minor disturbance excepting only to witnesses on the spot where horses were brought down and the woman killed.

All we heard was that the favourite had fallen. The excitement of the finish being over, the news of what had happened spread through the crowd, already intent on the runners for the next race and caring little about votes for women.

The sight of the horses and jockeys leaving the paddock for the next race dispelled all such ideas to the winds.

XLV

SEEKING AND PAINTING EXMOOR PONIES

PONIES on the moor – I always wanted to paint them. Wild ponies wandering free over thousands of acres of wide, undulating expanse. Herds of twenty or thirty, using their own territories – keeping to them, as birds do. If you want to find them, they have vanished. When least expecting them they appear on a skyline, or far below in a sheltered combe.

Imagine an April day; the moors a patterned harmony of buff and brown, the gorse out in patches. . . . A stationary group of ponies against the sky, others lower down the slope, their foals lying basking in the sun, whisking curly tails, unconscious of Bampton Fair and crowded trucks of ponies going where? . . . Would that I, an artist, could collaborate with a herd. To the fat, crested little stallion I might say, 'My good pony, if I bring a sack of oats, or half a load of nice hay, will you have your wives and children here to-morrow at ten?' 'We wait for no man,' is the reply.

Therefore I say to myself, 'Oh, muddling, slow-moving artist, get busy.' But how? By having a set plan. If I keep separate landscape outfits, separate boxes for panel sketches, for skies, then yet another must be kept for ponies. No mixing up. . . . My pony-painting outfit, a strong fishing-bag, bought from Mr Burgess at South Molton – an aged gentleman of the first water, a hairdresser, a tobacconist, a salmon- and trout-fisherman.

'Come inside, sir, for a moment,' he would say, after a haircut, and I would follow him through a door out of the shop to an abrupt change of scene – a beautiful parlour on the snug side.

Although it was war-time, he gave me a whisky and soda, and we looked at pictures and salmon in cases. Two large steel engravings attracted me, portraits of the Earl and Countess of Portsmouth, after Sir Francis Grant, P.R.A. Thoughts never rest. In that parlour, like a flash, my mind went on wings to the Academy, the Assembly Room and Sir Francis Grant's self-portrait.

'Come and look at this little oil,' said Mr Burgess, and the whisky and soda working on a starved, war-time human being, I saw in it great qualities, and so we hobnobbed over his treasures.

Dear Mr Burgess; I wonder if he is alive. Not long ago I wrote to a veterinary friend at North Molton about a blister, and received a letter from his wife that he was dead. Our good intentions die, too. I always intend to go to South Molton High Street and see if the name is still over the shop door.

But to the painting outfit in the Burgess fishing-bag, which was to hold my pochard painting-box, a carrier in which I could slide six wet panels, a cardboard box filled with small paint-tubes, bottles of turps, oil and copal varnish. All such details settled, the question arose: Where are the ponies? To locate them the day before was the thing. Seeking for a clue to their whereabouts, I would ride out in quest of ponies, asking whoever I met:

'Have you seen any ponies?'

'Yes, somewhere over the hill this morning, near the lane to Molland Moor' – or 'I see'd one lot down below the Common by Landacre.'

Then I would gallop over and round the hill to find them. So well did I know each herd that I recognized them a way off by this mare and that, or by the stallion. Imagine thousands of acres of Withypool Hill and common alone, where a man on foot could wander all day never seeing a pony. All the while they might be grazing near by just out of sight. Seeing a herd at Landacre in the evening, I was sure of finding them in the vicinity next morning. Myself on one horse, Bayfield on another, we faced the wild with bag and brushes. . . . 'A pony! a pony! my kingdom for a pony,' I sang out after an hour's fruitless search – Bayfield, well away on my left, scanning hill and hollow, whilst I, with field-glasses, swept the moor.

'Where the h—l are the little somethings?' I would say.

'Ah, well, they're about; we'll come on 'em shortly,' was the soothing reply.

'Ride, and look down the slope to your left,' said I.

Not a sight of a pony. Then, just as I thought of seeking another herd, Bayfield sat pointing.

'Where?' said I.

'There,' said he, still pointing, 'there's one; an' where there's one, the rest'll be, too,' was his wise remark.

As we rode, sure enough, there was the herd. Then, slowly drawing nearer, at length we stopped. Dismounting with the bag on my shoulder, tying a metal brush-case, like a pencil-case, to a cord which I fastened round my middle, I took the stool from Bayfield, giving him the end of my horse's rein, and sent him off home, saying, 'Come out about five o'clock and find me.' Often have I seen his figure with the horses going farther and farther away, dwindling to a speck on the moor, disappearing over a brow.

Standing there alone, two or three suspicious mares would stare at me, ready to trot off, whilst I pretended to look the other way, and walked nearer to them backwards. Then, sitting down, getting my pochard palette set, with a small selection of colour, and brushes in hand, I would wait awhile. At last, the mothers, seeing I was harmless, resumed grazing, whilst I stood up, crept

nearer and began to work. A large, fattish brush for the sky, another for the moor. How simple the whole thing was at that scale – how much better the result! The ponies, the little foals with white legs, made designs at whichever angle I approached.

Hours fled by; the foals resting or playing, the herd keeping to the same spot. A windy day was no good. A still day on the moor never was without wind. If I wake in another life, wherever it may be, I shall look back with regret upon those days with the ponies on the moor, far from anywhere, out of sight and sound of anyone.

Not only was I learning to paint them, I was observing their way of life. – I knew each one at sight. Weak whisky and water in a bottle, and bread and cheese. What more? . . . Writing can give no idea of my own particular feelings as one o'clock passed to two, three, four or five – of the places and tussocks which became intimate as I found myself on the same ground again a week later. I trod those slopes and combes, and crossed small streams, conscious or unconscious of where I was. At five o'clock, without fail, I would see a small horseman and horses coming from far away. Thank God I did not have to walk home. A horse can cover a big distance with ease over hill and down dale. Each wet panel had been slid into the wooden carrier, the box fastened, and all put away by the time man and horses arrived.

On getting back, the carrier and sketches were placed in a dark corner of the sitting-room. Not a sight did I allow myself of them until next morning, when I made room for fresh panels. Some of those small sketches, done in an hour, had a completeness and look of truth about them that one would never attain on a larger size. Day followed day with the ponies, weather permitting – a warm old overcoat about me. The smell of heather, the company of the ponies, taking no heed of my presence; small birds about me, a colony of rooks or a pair of ravens passing above. A precious day would pass in a combe to the sounds of running water and sheep; sweet scents of gorse in the warm air – the little foals resting at full length on the short turf in the sun. When I wanted them on their feet I walked nearer and touched them. Once when doing this a small, dark-brown mother, her ears laid flat, her eye wild, her mane flying, suddenly charged me. Before I could turn and fly, her teeth struck my knuckles, knocking the box from my hand. – Thought I, What strength and weight in a small compass! . . .

The little pony poem was written after meeting a herd in the lane leading from Withypool village to Braddy Moor, one of the territories of that herd of ponies.

AN EXMOOR LANE

Grey leaden clouds, slow moving overhead;
The trees and fences dripping as I pass;
A robin singing; berries turning red;
And underfoot the rank and sodden grass.

And all is shrouded in soft, misty rain;
And spattering drops are falling through the beech;
Still puddles lie along the rutted lane
In long, light streaks of grey which curve and reach

Between the fences, 'neath the rainy sky;
And calm, unbroken silence spreads around,
Save for the far-off rook's and jackdaw's cry
And sound of ceaseless rain upon the ground.

But hark! I hear the sound of unshod feet;
And ponies come in sight ten yards ahead.
We stare at one another as we meet;
And suddenly there's silence like the dead.

With pricked-up ears, bright eye and flowing mane;
The older ones amongst them seem to say,
'You cannot stop us coming up the lane;
For centuries we've used this right of way'.

Those hurrying feet are stayed. We stand and stare!
Then, as I draw aside to let them go,
The leader dashes by — an ancient mare,
And all the rest with mane and tail aflow,

Go charging by in vigorous life and strength;
Bright, startled eyes and forelocks blowing back;
Sturdy and stout, they gallop up the length
Of the long lane towards the moorland track.

And as I watch them galloping away;
The rain and dying bracken all forgot;
I feel how weak am I, how strong are they:
Theirs is a life of freedom, mine is not.

They disappear and leave me where I stand,
Alone and wondering at the passing sight,
As seen a hundred times in this wild land —
And often on a dark and eerie night

When folk are fast asleep and many snore,
You hear the hurried sound of unshod feet,
Of ponies as they change from moor to moor,
All rushing through the narrow village street.

They know no bounds, they wander where they will;
They graze beside the stream that babbles by;
When days are hot, they stand upon the hill —
A silhouetted group against the sky.

And in the spring the little foals are born;
And there they lie, all basking in the heat
Of some gorse-scented, blazing April morn,
Upon the close-cropped grass where ponies' feet

Have trodden on their way across the moor
Down to the running stream year after year.
A venerable grand-dam going on before
The stallion always bringing up the rear.

Exmoor, 1944

Written after hearing Reginald Bell, stained-window designer, tell us a story in the Arts Club of two Dartmoor ponies that were sent to his home at Minchinhampton, where they were put out on the Common.

THE STAINED-WINDOW ARTIST

I know of a curious fellow
Who plays with small pieces of glass;
All purple and crimson and yellow,
And he lives on three acres of grass.

He makes windows in chancels and chapels
In mem'ry of those who are dead,
And the sun thro' the windows makes dapples
All yellow and crimson and red.

And when he's not thinking of windows
He thinks of two ponies instead,
Which he brought from the dark hills of Dartmoor,
Where little, wild ponies are bred.

And these poor little ponies were females,
And two little foalies were born,
With bright eyes and soft little muzzles,
And hard little feet made of horn.

Then the man he took snuff on the common
And jingled his money and keys.
Said he, 'You can have all the money,
But give me my windows and these.'

So he made up a beautiful window
To all the poor ponies of yore,
Which had perished and died in the winters
And entered the heavenly door.

It shows just those two little foalies,
All rearing and rampant and proud,
In a paradise meadow with daisies,
And angels above on a cloud.

The children all wept when they saw it,
 And the man he was weeping like fun,
 Whilst the two little colts on the common
 Were sunning themselves in the sun.

So he went to the common and sat there
 With the silly old world moving by –
 As he watched his poor ponies and foalies,
 Sweet music came down from the sky.

Where angels from all the stained windows
 Gazed down through the heavenly door,
 With the spirits of all the poor ponies
 Which had perished with cold on the moor.

And they told him new secrets of yellows
 And purples and crimsons and gold,
 And his windows will glow on for ever
 In those chancels so ancient and old.

To all you who sit by the fireside
 With the snow drifting up round the door,
 Remember the poor, starving ponies
 Which perish with cold on the moor.

From A. J. M. to Reginald Bell

For me the peace of the moors was ending. Soon I would leave it all and become a striving unit in chaos, seeing past visions of sheep and ponies on a hillside in my dreams.

Only the restoration of my damaged home in Chelsea made it possible to attend to the duties of the Academy.

It is impossible to give a picture now of what at the time seemed a major disturbance.

My first sight of the dirty, empty house was a blow. Going into the dark studio, with felt coverings over the broken skylights, brought me to the verge of despair.

A builder and his brother, all that remained of a Chelsea firm, were my saviours.

Post-war happenings to our Chelsea home and Castle House may be added to a list of bad dreams.

After more dismal journeys back and forth between Taunton and Paddington, and the war-stricken, taxiless Liverpool Street, to Colchester, in crowded, crawling trains that continually stopped, things gradually took shape and order grew out of chaos.

A colossal furniture van filled with pictures, studio belongings, accumulated

books and winter horse-rugs groaned on the steep, everlasting hill out of Withypool, and in due course arrived in Chelsea, and afterwards at Dedham.

In every size, unfinished, accusing canvases showed themselves again, begging to be put right as they were stacked away.

Such disturbances and turmoil are best forgotten. Only the memory of an aged Britisher recalls them. His name was Eagle. An agile acrobat by nature, a builder's man by trade, he was a thinker.

When deep in thought, he brushed the back of his hand across the end of his nose, and hardest problems were thus solved. Although he is retired and gone from these parts, I picture him now. Beneath a cap which he never took off, a broad, beetling brow overhung two screwed-up grey eyes. A stubbly grey moustache, beneath which there dawned the cunning, craftsman's smile. Strong, stiff and stuggy, he was always in shirt-sleeves and blue overall trousers, with a handkerchief round his neck. Nothing defeated him. If a key was lost, he opened the lock. If a house fell, he could rebuild it.

Throughout the restoration of Castle House to its former life he was my sole hope and help.

I recall a glimpse of those days. 9 am. Myself walking up the road from the house of a friend where I was staying.

I walk into the overgrown garden, across a cemented surface where army lorries had stood, past a large Nissen hut on the lawn, and through the open glass doors into a furniture repository, and call out, 'Eagle!' 'Hullo!' comes the reply, and I find him heaving and hauling a rolled-up carpet.

Under his guidance the day begins, and we lift, push, carry and sweat until dark.

'No eye to watch,' no hand to help; Bayfield still with the horses in the West and Slocombe in the Army. Not a soul can I get but Eagle, who is ten men rolled in one.

Today, when I go upstairs, I think to myself, 'Eagle and I laid the stair-carpet' – every carpet. Everything in the house – this very table I sit at – all were restored to their places by the two of us.

Years speed on, and we forget such doings, as we forget names of horses we have seen in races. One little episode stands out. An old clock, which for years had stood in strange company, and had not been wound up, started again on finding itself in its old place in the centre of a mantelpiece!

Laying a carpet upstairs, Eagle and I stopped and listened! The clock below, already forgotten, was chiming the hour of seven.

'Well, who'd a thought it was so late? Better 'ave a cup of tea.'

And thus each room was brought back to its former state.

Looking round, it seems unbelievable that two men – one a P.R.A., the other an aged builder's man – ever accomplished the task. Pictures, tables, chairs, books all in the same places as of yore – and for how long now?

There is another upheaval besides war!

In some old houses furniture has stood for generations, but in many there have been a multitude of moves and changes. And here a poem called 'In the Room,' by James Thompson, comes back to memory. So rarely is it mentioned and so little known that I recommend it to readers.



Studies of Exmoor ponies

XLVI

ACADEMY ELECTIONS: MAKING MR CHURCHILL A MEMBER

WHAT of elections at the Academy, through which the Academy exists?

To tell how the proceedings of an election are carried out would be an arduous task. Already my poor descriptive powers are running out. We will imagine an election for two new Associates, the vacancies being for two painters. For some strange 'unknown reason, it must be 'an open election'. Scene: the long Reynolds room, with magnificent decorations on its ceiling and full-length Royal portraits by Sir Joshua and others on its walls. Chairs are set in rows facing the long table at the top end of the room by the windows.

Artists of every sort, description and age are signing their names, one after another, in the book by the door, and from thence they take their seats – always getting as far back and as far away as possible from the table, which is to be occupied by the President, Secretary, Treasurer and Keeper.

I take my place in the large grandfather chair covered in red leather, and, with my back to the light, unseen by them, I watch all the faces of that body of artists about to take part in a time-old proceeding which means the life and future of the Academy.

In the back rows, grouped together, I see a certain set of associates, not so young as they should be – not so young as were Lawrence, Turner or Millais, and a score of others of past years. There is a beard or two – Rubens and Drake, Anthony Trollope, Dickens had beards, so had Mephistopheles. How I hate shaving. It would take but little to make me start a beard too.

I am hoping this group will not vote in a block for some belated English abstract performer – a sort of man who, were he elected, would vote for others like himself.

The assembly votes for this man and that, and voting-list papers are collected and handed to the President.

Taking each paper, I read out the name marked, crumpling the papers or tearing them in halves as I cast them into the basket at my side. (A sad waste of paper.)

The Treasurer, Keeper and Secretary have kept the number of votes for each candidate, and finding all correct, the Secretary reads out the names of candidates who have received four or more votes and then, like a schoolmaster, writes them in chalk upon the big blackboard.

All the while I watch the faces of this body of privileged men sitting in a magnificent room that breathes of the past.

Voting-list papers are again handed round, and this time votes are given only for names on the board. Again the collection, and the papers are laid before me, and again I read out names, destroying and consigning each paper to the basket as before. (More waste.) Following this, the names of the two candidates who get the biggest number of votes are chalked on the board.

There is then a ballot, which means that I stand with a little box full of cork balls, handing them out, one at a time, to members as they walk up the gangway with hands outstretched to take and place a ball in either side of the ballot box, standing on the table in front of me.

A most interesting experience for a crafty President, for he sees which way hands are putting in the balls and sees which way the wind is blowing. Alas! this is not all. A strange new innovation of a few years' standing has come about.

There has to be yet another ballot, taking up more time; – a ballot of *Yes* or *No* – and unless the newly elected gets two-thirds *Yes* he is not elected at all. A man may be in by that amount, yet the ballot must go on; and behold what happens! He is 'out' – inside out, properly out. A mystery that can only be guessed at. Perhaps he was being run to keep an abstract painter out.

On one occasion two painters tied, and, as President, I had the right of the casting vote, and gave it to him I considered the better artist. Then, in a word from the chair, I said that, having won by a short head, I hoped they would not put this artist out in the ballot. Then came the *Yes* and *No*, and he was miles out!

Had this rule been in force instead of the old and right way of election, I should probably not have been in on my election as an A.R.A., and surely not as an R.A., for in the latter I tied with the late Sir Walter Russell, and the President gave me the casting vote.

There were many good and exciting elections long ago which took far less time. And great was the clapping and applause when good artists were in, and on that evening after dinner at the Arts Club in Dover Street there were celebrations, with speeches and champagne.

Nothing of that kind happens today. There is still the yawning gap made by a bomb on the left side of Dover Street where that beautiful Club once stood and where we had those nights of revelry.

Perhaps the night of nights was on the occasion of the election of Sir Edwin Lutyens, when the Club held a dinner in his honour.

The new P.R.A. was in form, and the hour was late before we left the beautiful drawing-room.

I now recall that I made the design for the menu, and I am sorry I cannot reproduce it in this book.

My last duty as P.R.A. was the election of my good successor, Sir Gerald Kelly.

Such an election is made by full members only, and there was a large attendance of R.A.s.

After an exciting final counting of ballot balls without the senseless *Yes* or *No* ceremony, Kelly became the P.R.A., and took his place by me, and with a few words and a sigh of relief rather than regret, and with another of satisfaction at Kelly's election, I performed with gladness the time-honoured ceremony of placing the President's chain of office round his neck and shaking him by the hand, even as the deputy President, Vincent Harris, had shaken mine when I was elected just five years before. For I knew that if ever there was a determined fellow to carry on, it was Gerald Kelly.¹ Being a countryman and living seldom in my Chelsea home, and having suffered too many interruptions in my work, the Presidency was more than I was able to cope with.

Besides many Council and other meetings, there were too many dinners and banquets and too much wrestling with boiled shirts, which I detest. Only the presence and help of Mr Hubbocks, the resident attendant, who used to keep my evening clothes in order and help me into my finery, made all this dressing far easier and more pleasant. In fact, when I arrived in the big bedroom where other Presidents before me had changed so often, and when I saw my clothes all laid out ready, immaculately folded – white, starched waistcoat, the enemy boiled shirt, the black socks, the shoes – I felt that all was not lost or in vain.

Not a soul is more devoted to the Academy and all it stands for than I; but to paint, not only for oneself, but for the Exhibition, and to be in London with my heart in the country was no easy task.

During my thirty years' membership of the Academy I have often been on the Hanging Committee, and recall the thrills when good pictures turned up. After Sargent's death in 1925, among the pictures that helped the show were those by Orpen and Ambrose McEvoy.

Memories of these two men alone would fill pages. In a line I will say that McEvoy was one of the dearest fellows I have ever known. If I were giving a little dinner at the Garrick, his presence made it complete. But to the hanging.

I am now reminded of a much later thrill, in the first year of my Presidency – the arrival of two full-length portraits of the King and Queen by Kelly. The artist had been given a week's grace, and the wall at the end of the large gallery was kept for them. We on the Committee welcomed those excellent pictures when they were brought in and hung on the wall.

'Bravo!' said I to Kelly.

Had I not, in the summer before, at Windsor Castle, seen the indefatigable

¹ Since I wrote this the P.R.A. and Council have held an Exhibition of the *École de Paris* in the Academy.

artist at work on them near a tall window in a vast room? In those large full-length State portraits nothing was shirked. Kelly had spent some years at Windsor, patiently painting passage after passage.

I doubt if there is a painter today who would have done those pictures so thoroughly as he who followed me as P.R.A.

One of the quickest and most unanimously settled affairs was when we made Winston Churchill a member in extraordinary of the Royal Academy.

Before then he had sent in pictures in the usual way, which had gone through with the rest of outsiders' works and had been hung.

In the first instance it was difficult to persuade so modest an artist to send in his work.

'Unless you treat me as an outsider and put my work in with the rest to go before the Selecting Committee, I do not wish to send,' said he. 'I don't trust you a yard, Alfred. Whatever happens you'll pass them because they are mine.'

He doubted it when I told him the Committee would not know which were his pictures and would judge them with the rest.

After I had asked Sir Edward Marsh to go and help him to pick out three of his best, he only consented to send two. Here is Sir Edward's reply to my message:

*80 Walton Street S.W.3.
28th March, 1947*

My dear Alfred,

Just after you had telephoned, W. rang up and arranged to take me down to Chartwell this morning – and I am just back. We decided on two pictures, which I thought were certainly the best. There were one or two more that seemed to me good enough, but he was very choosy and resolute to send only the two – which he will do before 5 pm tomorrow – Saturday – I do hope you will approve the choice.

Yours ever,
(signed) EDDIE MARSH

Before his election in 1949 he asked me to lunch at Chartwell to see which pictures I thought would be good ones to send in the spring. An artist does not always know his best works. Did any amateur, working straight from Nature, ever accumulate more sketches through the years than Winston Churchill?

On arriving at Chartwell I was reminded of the past. The door was opened by a tall butler.

'You won't remember me, Sir Alfred,' said he.

I looked at him; memory failed me, and no wonder.

'I was the Corporal of Horse who posed for you in your Chelsea studio, and sat on a horse in the square at Albany Street Barracks when you were painting the picture of King George giving the new Colours to the Household Cavalry. Captain Speed picked me out for you as a model.'

'To think', said I, 'that you, in this get-up, were once the Life Guardsman,

in plumed helmet and breastplate and all the rest of it, sitting on a black horse for me.'

'Yes, sir,' said he; 'and do you remember, when you opened the door to me at Chelsea and I walked in, the plume of my helmet hit against the top of the door and gave us both a shock?'

To get back to my story – the hoarding of his own paintings by our great statesman. Often have I seen stacks of paintings in studios, but never so many of all sorts of open-air themes as I saw before and after lunch at Chartwell. Being a lover of Nature, and completely bound to painting in the open, my regrets were that there was not time to consider and appreciate to the full this mass of work.

The artist himself was wearing blue overalls. In one strange apartment – half studio, half gallery – canvases hung one above the other to the ceiling. In another place – a sort of summer-house – they were leaning in piles against the wall. No little panels – all thirty-by-twenty-five-inch canvases. Attack, attack was written on all of them. Have a shot, paint what you see. Maybe it was a glorious escape for a great mind.

'They're nothing,' he said – 'just sketches.'

How was I, being no flatterer, to make him see how good many of them were?

'My dear sir,' said I, 'Nature has been your inspiration. The poorest efforts before Nature have something in them that others have not. Many of these paintings are better than you think.'

But Winston doubted my words. His work had the vital touch about it. The outcome of the visit was that I persuaded him to allow us to elect him as member in extraordinary, and also to send six works. I suggested that he should send us more than that number to choose from, for he was no judge of his own work, being more humble than most of the thrusters and creators of gaucheries that we see today.

Here is his letter about the pictures he was invited to send. Patrickson was the frame-maker whom I had recommended to do the frames.

28 Hyde Park Gate,
London, S.W.7.

17th March 1949

My dear Alfred,

I am sending you, as you desired, a number of my poor daubs. Mr Patrickson will take your directions as to moving them from 28 Hyde Park Gate, where they now are, to your Headquarters. He will also do anything in the way of glass, varnishing or framing which you may advise. He is ready to move these pictures on Monday, 21st March.

I have thought a good deal about these pictures. I attach the greatest importance to the 'Fontaine de Vaucluse' because it is the only one of these I have painted in modern times. . . . You thought very well of it yourself. This is my No. 1. As to the others, I think No. 2 is a good contrast in simplicity to No. 1. It has also the advantage of being land, not water.

* 11

Various good judges think that 'The Palladian Bridge' should come third. 'Sunset. Cannes Harbour', No. 4 has also been praised and I think you thought well of it.

I do not suppose you will be able to find room for any more, but you said send them up, so here they are.

All good luck to your Show.

Yours very sincerely,

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

1. 'Fontaine de Vaucluse.' 1948.
2. 'Sunset. Templeton, Roehampton.' *Circa* 1920.
3. 'The Palladian Bridge, Wilton.' *Circa* 1925.
4. 'Sunset. Cannes Harbour.' *Circa* 1923.
5. 'Winter Woodland.' *Circa* 1925.
6. 'Lake near Breccles.' *Circa* 1929.
7. 'Boats in Cannes Harbour.' *Circa* 1935.
8. } 'Mimizan.' 1930.
9. }
10. *Circa* 1927.

Since then Mr Churchill has become an owner of racehorses and has been made a member of the Jockey Club. His grey horse, Colonist, was a wonder. Winston and Colonist will go down to posterity in the annals of racing. Surely no horse ran more long-distance races in a season.

My first sight of the wall-eyed grey was at an Ascot meeting. Standing against the rail of the paddock, I found myself next to Lord and Lady Southampton, both keen judges of a horse. We thought Colonist a plain, queer-looking animal. Later we stood by the low wall of the Members' Enclosure, watching the race.

'He'll never catch the leading horse,' said Lady Southampton.

The leading horse was indeed far ahead. As the field came into the straight the tension was felt all over the course. Then we saw the grey overhauling the rest, galloping on, passing them all – a winner. No greater excitement or applause could happen at a meeting. Rushing to the winner's enclosure, we could there study the make and shape of Colonist, as we have since done again and again.

The racing world is now so used to the sight that it ceases to wonder at such a phenomenon of ownership, or at the horse himself.

Mr Churchill asked me to paint him; already I had determined to do this, and on the Sunday between the August Bank Holiday Saturday and Monday of the Epsom meeting – being in London – my wife and I motored to Nightingall's for tea and saw the horse out in the yard, stripped of his clothing. Let us glance for a moment at the wonder. At once we see why he is so sound, why he can be asked to race so often. Note those clean limbs. Study the horse's points. A good head, a strong jaw, a fair length of neck, the right shoulder and girth, and what a back and loin! But see, what bone! Last, but not least, the horse has the strongest and best of hocks. I see his wall eye as I write – his

galloping action, as he passed me, leading the two French horses in the Jockey Club Cup two days ago. So near to the course was I standing between the five- and six-furlong posts that I saw the wall eye fixed on the ultimate goal. Crossed with the right mares he surely will sire horses to gallop and stay, and may his owner live to see them win!

COLONIST II (Grey colt - Ricnzo-Cybele)

1949

As a three-year-old Colonist II ran six times. He won three races, was second once, third once and once unplaced. His victories were scored in the following races:

Upavon Maiden Stakes (1 mile), Salisbury. Value £291 16s.
Lime Tree Maiden Stakes (1½ miles), Windsor. Value £359 8s.
Ribblesdale Stakes (1½ miles), Ascot. Value £593 2s.

1950

Of eleven races Colonist had as a four-year-old, he won eight, was second once and fourth twice. He was successful in each of his last six races. The races he won were:

Victor Wild Stakes (1½ miles), Kempton. Value £493 16s.
Paradise Stakes (1¼ miles), Hurst Park. Value £530 18s.
July Stayers' Stakes (2 miles), Sandown. Value £750 15s.
Bentinck Stakes (1¾ miles), Goodwood. Value £1,044 5s.
Florizel Handicap (2 miles), Kempton. Value £569 9s.
Kensington Palace Stakes (2 miles), Ascot. Value £1,391.
Lowther Stakes (1¾ miles), Newmarket. Value £1,255 15s.
Jockey Club Cup (2¼ miles), Newmarket. Value £1,170.

He finished fourth in the Gold Cup behind Supertello, Bagheera and Alindrake.

In two seasons Colonist has won for his owner eleven races worth £8,450.

XLVII

THE FAMOUS ACADEMY SPEECH

Therefore every artist working in a sound tradition of plastic values has the right to denounce the treachery of those writers who use a sound tradition in prose to acclaim the modernistic attack on sound plastic traditions.

LINDSAY

NEVER did I walk up the Academy stairs and through the beautiful mahogany doors into the still more beautiful saloon without staying a moment to look at the two pictures hanging on either end wall, one of the Life School at Hogarth's Academy, 'St Martin's Lane', by Hogarth, the other by Zoffany.

There is no stopping thought; these paintings started a whole train of thought which would take a quarter of the time that it does even to pick up a pencil and much more to write. In a moment I was imagining the great Hogarth working on his Life-Room picture, wondering how he did it, and the same with the Zoffany, which reminds me that these two pictures have grown rather dark. Then, turning towards a window near the mahogany door leading to the Secretary's room on the right, I would take another momentary look out on to the courtyard and at the back of the bronze figure of Sir Joshua, standing in front of the Academy below. . . . More trains of thought.

In the Secretary's room I would see Sir Walter Lamb at his large, paper-strewn desk; I hoped that on my desk there would not be many letters – but there were.

The mahogany door on the left of the saloon led into the Council Room. This, like all the front rooms of the building, with its doors and painted ceiling, had remained untouched since Lord Burlington's day. I have read in one of the books about the Academy how, long ago, before it moved into Burlington House, when the building was still in the possession of the Burlington family, Sir Francis Grant – then a young man – was painting the very old Lady Burlington's portrait in that room. She told Sir Francis how, as a young girl, she sat to Sir Joshua who worked with his canvas alongside the sitter, walking back to see and compare the two from time to time, whilst Sir Francis, she noticed, worked at the canvas away from the model.

All sorts of things were decided at Council meetings; while the Secretary read the minutes, I always tried to bring my mind to bear on each, but it would wander away, sometimes from face to face around the table, and I would make a guess as to which members were taking it all in, word for word. Sir Edwin Lutyens, my predecessor, would sometimes smoke one of his many small pipes, and always made queer drawings on the blotting-paper, consciously or unconsciously.

Before my election, as already related, a member wrote to me warning me of the ways of artists – they were kittle-cattle; how true it was! Sometimes I would suggest what I thought to be a grand idea; it would be turned down. After I had protested, one member – that same member who spoke of kittle-cattle – would exclaim:

‘My dear President, you can’t override the Council in this way.’

The public little knows of the help bestowed upon bereft widows and families of artists by the Royal Academy, through annuities and bequests made by members such as the great Turner and others.

Considerate – each of us listening as the Secretary read the details of a case of an applicant seeking benefit of some annuity or donation – we grew sad as our artists’ minds imagined the condition of life to which a widow or a disabled or elderly artist had been brought. No deserving case was ever turned down.

If a Council meeting was held at five o’clock, tea was brought in – two large, handsome, silver Georgian teapots, milk-jug and sugar-basin on a large silver tray. Seeing ourselves seated thus, on period settees or Nelson armchairs, was I not justified in thinking that we were housed in a noble building and that we should try to live up to it?

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If the exhibition of Chantrey pictures brought me a pile of correspondence, my speech at the Academy Banquet in 1949 brought me sackfuls which I opened and read in this very room.

The long-delayed dinner – the first after the war, a dinner which followed after the break of a long sequence of banquets going back to the days of Reynolds – had been put off, perhaps too long. If the subject were brought up I would say:

‘Let us paint good pictures and have a good exhibition; then we can have a dinner every week if you like.’

It was Mr Churchill, our newly elected member extraordinary, who spurred me on. He said:

‘You must start those famous dinners again. They mean so much to the Academy.’

At that time I had decided to resign the Presidency of the Academy. Mr Churchill’s words stirred something within me. I would stay on another year, if only to have the dinner.

'All right,' I said; 'if you'll come and make a speech, we'll have the dinner.'

'Of course,' said he. 'Let's have a rag.'

Those magic words were enough. A rag – and a good party – that was the thing! Not a heavy, solemn affair; that was why I arranged beforehand with the Bandmaster of the Royal Artillery band to play after the toast of 'The Forces of the Crown', that time-honoured song 'Where are the Boys of the Old Brigade', and it happened as I arranged – all of us standing with glasses filled, many of us singing with the band:

Steadily, shoulder to shoulder,
Steadily, blade by blade,
Ready and strong,
Marching along,
Like the Boys of the Old Brigade.

I am sure that Lord Montgomery appreciated that turn before rising to his feet to respond.

Shaking hands with the guests as they arrived, and joining them in sherry, and with enough champagne at dinner, I threw off all cares and responsibilities as to what I was going to say, trusting to a few notes and items which I had memorized. The toastmaster at this banquet, standing behind me, was a great success. A month beforehand, in the Secretary's room, I had told Sir Walter Lamb that I was determined to have a toastmaster, the one we heard at the Lord Mayor's dinners – a noble fellow who knew his job, and who could give a good start to the dullest dog for a speech. Said Sir Walter:

'We have never had a toastmaster in my recollection, and I have been here thirty years.'

'Well, we're going to have one now,' said I, 'and what's more, as the big gallery is a bad one for sound, we must have it amplified in some way.'

'Oh, we can't do that,' said he.

'Well, we must,' was my reply.

This amplifying was never done¹ – although it was arranged this year – but we had the Lord Mayor's toastmaster, who must have got tired of announcing me. This being my only experience of broadcasting (I admit I forgot I was on the air), and the only speech I had ever attempted in so distinguished a company, readers must excuse me if I give it in detail, from a B.B.C. recording. At last, after the toast to the Academy, came those ringing words, spoken in the same faultless style:

'Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, Your Graces, My Lords and Gentlemen, pray silence for the President of the Royal Academy, Sir Alfred Munnings.'

With one last sip of wine, I rose to my feet. I was ready for anything after

¹ Not until I was seated at the Banquet did I learn that my instructions had not been carried out. Hence my loud efforts to be heard.

that, and with the Duke of Gloucester on my right, an Ambassador on my left, and Mr Churchill next to him, I began. I did for a moment refer to my notes or headings, but as I went on I saw certain faces which gave me a line. Seeing a most distinguished guest, I was reminded of a stone figure of the Virgin and Child that I had seen in a church in Northampton, and a pile of circulars lying near it on a table – printed copies of an address by that gentleman which he had read out as he unveiled it. I recalled how I had seen two people in the church staring at the figure, inquiring if it had been done before Michelangelo's day and if it had influenced that great sculptor's art? I picked up a copy of the address and handed it to them. . . . Here was a refresher – a reminder of what I wanted to say before the wine died out.

Again – I saw the face of Anthony Blunt, Surveyor of the King's Pictures, who had helped us in hanging them a year back. Had I not seen him in that very Gallery, at one of the King's evening parties, surrounded by a group of people, pointing his finger at a full length by Reynolds, saying that Picasso was a finer artist?

All this flashed back to my mind at the sight of his face, and gave me another lead as I came to the word 'Blunt', finishing the sentence in which I had referred to these experts of pictures, and how their judgment, with seeing so many pictures, had become *blunt*. Afterwards a friend of mine – a jolly fellow, and a member of the Academy, who sat next to him – told me that Mr Blunt, on hearing what I had to say about him, said, 'Now I know why I have been asked.' He was quite wrong there, because I had not even known he had been asked until I shook hands with him at the top of the stairs. Besides, why should not his views about Picasso be known, even though he were the Surveyor of the King's Pictures? He might be right, or he might not!

Once, towards the end, did I have a slight difficulty in pronouncing the word 'innumerable', in referring to the forest of Fontainebleau from *The Treasure of Franchard* by Robert Louis Stevenson – one of my favourite short stories. It should have run thus:

. . . and the sound of innumerable thousands of tree-tops and innumerable millions on millions of green leaves was abroad in the air. . . .

Maybe it was this stumble that inspired a letter from Richmond asking what were the vintages from the Academy's cellars which we drank at the dinner.

It was a great night. After Mr Churchill had made such a speech as only he can make, the company rose, and everybody – archbishops, admirals, field-marshal – went into Room Number Eleven to see the *masterpieces* which the Committee had placed there against my advice, with the approval of the Council. It was then that the Duke of Gloucester found the strangest piece in a corner: in my opinion an unfair usage of those time-honoured walls taken by an enthusiastic young member who had the hanging of that room, and who should have known better.

Afterwards the Duke of Gloucester, Professor Richardson, my dear architect friend, and one or two other member friends with a sound and sane outlook, and myself were upstairs in the Assembly Room having a late whisky and soda. Suddenly the door opened, and there was Sir Walter Lamb, looking in to see what was going on – what all the laughter was about. In his dark overcoat, with a silk muffler around his neck, he was all ready to leave. He had come in to warn us that the hour was late and it was time to be going, but when his eye fell on His Royal Highness, he stopped, at the same time holding up a warning finger to me.

'There'll be about six libel suits against you after this,' he said, whereat we all laughed louder than ever, and he bade us good night.

Little thinking of what I had said, having forgotten that I had been 'on the air', as they say, I went home to Chelsea, to awake next morning to the ringing of the telephone, which did not cease throughout the morning – the morning of the Private View Day.

Arriving at the Academy at about twelve o'clock, I found shoals of telegrams¹ already pouring in from everywhere: from France, from Finland; cables from far away – from the States, even from South Africa – all approving of what I had said. Then began the vast, never-ending flow of letters which, if printed, would fill a volume. At my wish a canvas bagful was carried up to the Council Room, and there, alone in my glory, I sat for hours reading them until I was late – almost too late – for dinner at the Athenaeum. For days and weeks afterwards the flow continued. It was quite impossible to keep pace with them. Only four of these were against me. Somebody from Hampstead had written that I had got an uncultured mind, and that I was not worthy to kiss Picasso's boots. I am glad to know that. If a suave, oily voice heard on the B.B.C. denotes culture, then I do not want to be reckoned as cultured.

Some listeners will swallow anything a cultured speaker tells them on the wireless about the wondrous sculptured groups conceived by modern sculptors. Let us hope such listeners are in the minority!

What a night scene could one conjure up of a lecturing, broadcasting, gallery Director's bedroom, faintly lit from outside by street-lamps!

Last sounds of traffic have died away and all is silent as the grave!

The lecturer sleeps, unaware of the monstrous, grotesque female figure moving across the floor towards the bed! It stoops over the sleeper! He awakes! And at sight of that featureless face, with a scream that sounds afar outside, turning folk pale and setting policemen running in the streets, he bounds out of bed and flies through the door, pursued by the monster, the subject of his lectures! . . . His screams die away and cease. Hurrah! She's got him!!

¹ One telegram from the North said: 'Well done! Helvellyn shook!'

THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH

Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, Your Graces, My Lords and Gentlemen, pray silence for the President of the Royal Academy, Sir Alfred Munnings.

Your Royal Highness, my lords and gentlemen, I am getting somewhat distressed. Through some extraordinary arrangement, these toasts have all been put on The President. There are men in this Academy who could easily have proposed the toasts of The Guests or the toast of The Ministers, but here am I, giving toast after toast: as they say in hunting – I've been up in the air all the time.¹ I have never been on my seat but for a few minutes, and am feeling like a most awful interrupter. I know what it is – and have known what it is – to sit at these tables when there has been much more company – carousing and drinking – little thinking of the poor President at his table . . . regardless of all that he has to go through and to *get away with*, to put it in a common term of speech. . . .

Here am I, responding for The Academy. If I glance at my notes you must excuse me. Now, the Archbishop of Canterbury has spoken well – I should say in a very accomplished way – about this body of men. But what of the body? Are they worthy of this building in which they are housed? Are we all doing the great work which we should do? Well . . . my Lords and Gentlemen; it is not for me to stand here on my feet tonight and find one fault with the Royal Academy. Sitting here with members on either side of you . . . and you will have found out what intelligent men artists are.

But I find myself a President of a body of men who are what I call shilly-shallying. They feel that there is something in this so-called modern art. You will say, I am getting right away into the subject. Well, I myself would rather have – excuse me, my Lord Archbishop – a damned bad failure, a bad, muddy old picture where somebody has tried to do something, to set down what they have seen, than all this affected juggling, this following of what – shall we call it of the school of Paris? (I trust the French Ambassador is not here tonight.)

Not so long ago I spoke in this room to the students, and in my poor discourse I said to these boys and girls: they are not boys and girls – more than half of them are grown up, and they are receiving all sorts of gratuities from the Government – for what? To learn Art and to become what? Not artists. . . . I said to those students, 'If you paint a tree – for God's sake try and make it look like a tree, and if you paint a sky, try and make it look like a sky. . . .' Only these last two days I have been motoring from Dedham to Newmarket and back. . . . On Sunday I motored through Suffolk, and was looking at skies

¹ A hunting expression meaning there were many jumps. It was my duty to give five toasts: The King, The Queen and Royal Family, The Ministers of The Crown, The Armed Forces and The Guests.

all the time . . . and on Monday, what skies there were! . . . And still, in spite of all those men who have painted skies in the past, we should be painting skies still *better*. But there has been a foolish interruption to all efforts in Art, helped by foolish men writing on the Press, encouraging all this damned nonsense, putting all these younger men out of their stride. . . . I am right – I have the Lord Mayor on my side and *all* the Aldermen and *all* the City Companies. There is a Master of a City Company here tonight, the Master of the Mercers' Company – Lord Selborne – and I am sure he is with me; and on my left I have the famous newly elected extraordinary member of the Academy – Winston Churchill. He, too, is with me because. . . . (*But I won't repeat the rest of my sentence, it caused the loudest 'hear, hears' and the most prolonged laughter of the evening.*)

Now we have all sorts of highbrows here tonight, experts who think they know more about Art than the men who paint the pictures, even the poor devils who have sat out in the open and tried to paint a landscape and failed. They are – if I may use a common expression – so fed-up to the teeth in pictures, they move among pictures, they see so many pictures, as I have seen this afternoon – that their judgment becomes blunt, yes, blunt! . . . That reminds me of Anthony Blunt. . . . Anthony Blunt, is he here tonight? He once stood with me in this very room during an evening party when the King's pictures were here. There was a full-length Reynolds hanging on the end wall, a fine picture – and he was telling some people that Reynolds was not as good as Picasso. What an extraordinary thing for a man to say! . . . Perhaps I should not mention names, but I do not care, since I am resigning at the end of this year. . . . I do not wish to go on with an Academy that says – their profound minds working and thinking – 'Well, there *must* be something in this modern art; these writers are getting busy, we must give the jugglers a show' – and so, if you go into Number Eleven, you will see faint zephyr breezes – very faint zephyr breezes. . . . I should call them violent blows of nothing. Here we are in this Academy, and you, gentlemen, were assembled to take sherry in the Octagon Room, where there was a woman carved out of wood, and God help us if all the race of women looked like that! (*Prolonged laughter.*) Sculptors today are sinking away into a fashion of bloated, heavy-weight monstrous nudes. You saw the things exhibited in Battersea Park. They were put there by the London County Council. We are spending millions every year on Art education, and still we exhibit all these foolish drolleries to the public. I have stood in the Park; I have been with the people who were there, and asked them questions, and they were disgusted and angered, as were those whom I met looking at the Madonna and Child in a church in Northampton. I happened to be up there at a Horse Show, and not being a very great rider, was one of the judges of hunters, the others being the head of the Mounted Police, Colonel de Chair, and Lord Allerton. On the preceding day, after our arrival, I said to my wife, 'Before we get any further – before we go to the hotel, let us hunt these churches – let us seek out this masterpiece

which *The Times* eulogized during the war, with a photograph shown on the back page.'

After visiting other churches, we found the church at last, and I said to my wife, 'You wait in the car, I will come back and tell you if it is there.' I came back and said, 'Come along,' and we walked up the aisle, and there was this 'graven image'. . . . Well, Canon Hussey, or whoever it was, wished for this thing, and other gentlemen may have suggested it, but I would like to ask everybody here if they could – if they have a day or week-end to spare – to travel up to Northampton and see the statue of the Madonna and Child in this church. I am speaking plainly. My horses may be all wrong – we may all be wrong – but I'm damned sure that isn't right.

I am not going on too long, for a great man is speaking after me – but I would like to say that I took a car this afternoon and went to the Tate Gallery and the National Gallery. I went to that room in the Tate – I would ask you all to go and see it – the second room on the right with white walls, which is nothing but wall with a few pictures spotted around, and there you will see a picture by Matisse, 'Le Forêt' (The Forest). (Interruptions from members 'Beautiful work . . .') I hope you hear the other members interrupting me at the end of the room. As I am President and have the right of the Chair, allow me to speak. I shall not be here next year, thank God!

In the *Telegraph* I was reported as having said in an address to Academy students – ' . . . If you paint a tree, for God's sake let it look like a tree. . . . ' Well, a lady called Mary Borden wrote a long letter to that same paper, a column in length, ending up with saying how, if she sat in a wood cluttered up with trees, she would have welcomed this canvas – 'Le Forêt' – if it had come crashing through the delicate green of the undergrowth to her feet – 'the very spirit of a tree!!' . . . I can say no more. Go and look at that spirit of a tree. But hear what Robert Louis Stevenson wrote of a forest in his story, *The Treasure of Franchard*. 'The sound of innumerable thousands of treetops, and innumerable millions on millions of green leaves was abroad in the air, and filled the ear with something between whispered speech and singing!!' . . . I think that expresses more than Mary Borden's letter did to the *Telegraph*. Gentlemen, may I say one last word? In the National Gallery today, amongst those Munich pictures, there is one by Rubens of himself and his wife which brought back many early memories to me of when I used to go to Munich fifty years ago. What a picture! and I see that *The Times* art critic has dared to write that the technique and painting of the gold and silver on the wife's dress made the work of Renoir look like that of an amateur. A great thing for that critic to say, and I entirely agree with him.

Gentlemen, as President here, and resigning President, I thank you for drinking the health of the Royal Academy, as you have done, and I wish you all well.

XLVIII

ROUTE TO NEWMARKET
DAY OF THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE

25TH OCTOBER 1950

(Dictated the whole way there and back)

HERE is one more detailed attempt to paint in words a journey which is only for artists and lovers of the countryside.

A glorious October day. We go through Dedham and over the bridge across the Stour and along Water Lane. Passing a large piece of transport – a threshing-machine – we come in sight of Stratford Church, with its pinnacled tower in the sun. Ahead, on the right, an old thatched cottage which appeared in one of Constable's best drawings: it was called 'Cottage in Water Lane, Dedham'. . . . Now we have left Stratford Church, with the bright light on its walls, the pinnacles of the tower showing paler than the blue sky.

From Stratford St Mary to Sudbury, and through Long Melford on to Clare, we shall be running the whole length of the Stour Valley. Now we are coming to Higham, famous for me because there is the home of the great Freddie Bowcher, who has appeared in my story as the owner of Cryptical, winner of the National Hunt at Cheltenham in 1928. . . . Leaving Higham Green, ahead of us is an ancient house which was once an inn, and passing the drive gates of Bowcher's house we see his Daimler where it stands in the open, day and night, winter and summer. Over the river on the left is one of the few Suffolk farmsteads with cattle standing in yards all winter – as they should do. This is good, though lightish land, through which we are passing – between Higham and Stoke – kept in good heart by a great farmer who still has a thousand sheep, and six or seven hundred bullocks. Then we go by two more old-fashioned farmsteads, each in his hands. On the right Thorington Old Hall, a grand relic of the past – perhaps the finest farm-house in Suffolk.

Ascending the hill beyond Thorington Street towards Stoke we are running along a ridge – Tendring Park and Hall on the left, the Hall designed by Sir John Soanes – the land along on the right sloping gradually down to the valley of the Box, a tributary of the Stour. Looking across it at this time of the year, we see one of the most lovely stretches of landscape in Suffolk – in East Anglia. . . .

Now we enter Stoke – the village of all villages – bright in the sun, its tall church tower aglow in the light. Leaving the road to Polstead on the right, we pass by a delightful, old-fashioned, Jane Austen sort of house, which I always call Aunt Tabitha's. Council houses have just been passed by, which are nothing at all – worse than nothing – and they might have been *so* excellent!

Then we are making towards Leavenheath and Assington. . . . On either side, undulating, old-world fields, going back to the days of sheep and shepherds. Alas! not a sheep is to be seen today! The one flock in sight of the road has been already passed at Thorington Street – Mr Alec Page's thousand.

The driver of the car and I both keep a sharp look-out for sheep. I have told him I will give him five shillings for every flock we see on the road.

'I shan't get very rich at that rate,' says he.

A hundred years, or sixty years ago, one could not have seen the country for sheep. . . .

Now we have passed a grand sight for my foolish self: a cart-horse pulling a load of mangolds, with a real country lad leading it.

Here is Assington, and its church and hall – now training youths to be monks! Once it was one of the small ancient homes of old Suffolk – a family named Gurdon lived there. . . . Now we come to my Caldecott farm-house, where such a man as Farmer Springwheat of *Sponge's Sporting Tours* might have lived. On the right, towards Newton, is a vast field of two hundred acres, all the dividing hedges and ditches long since gone. This field is sprinkled with a herd of black-and-white Friesians – would they were Shorthorns which look better in English landscape. But Friesians give great quantities of milk and farmers invest in herds which produce quantity.

Still travelling between forty-five and fifty miles an hour through open, rolling country, and not a flock of sheep in sight so far. No farm, on such medium or light soil, should be without a flock, or was without one forty years ago.

Now the road runs between big, ancient fences: large elms on either side:

With autumn laying here and there
A fiery finger on the leaves.

We are coming to Little Cornard on the right, and the church with its steeple. Great Cornard is away in the fields. Already we are into the suburbs and pavements, clipped fences and garden walls of Sudbury, the home of the great Gainsborough! What would he think of the increasing growth of this small town – the mass of motor-cars and charabancs parked in the Market Place? His statue stands outside the west end of the big, flint-built church at the top end of the Market Place. Now we pass the fish-shop where they smoke the *bloaters*!

Leaving Sudbury: more Victorian white-bricked, blue-slatted villas; endless rows of Victorian houses; lime-trees; clipped fences; garden walls.

Already at Acton we are running along the north side of the Stour valley,

passing the opening of a lane leading down to the large white water-mills – another relic of the past – and still working. . . . More Friesians. . . .

On the left we see a large pasture with a herd of old-fashioned cows – a herd which fills me with regrets because I should have given up horses long ago, come over here, resided somewhere near by, and painted that herd for the rest of my life. Each evening, returning from various meetings at Newmarket, do we pass a country girl driving these placid cows. Among them is a black one; two blue-and-white; one – a real, old-fashioned type – all white; another yellow and white, rather like a Guernsey, but too large for a true Guernsey; and a strawberry roan. As we steady up to pass them I am staring out of the car window – all worked up – cursing myself because I am not painting this perfect picture for the artist. . . .

Here is Long Melford street – one of the settlements of the great cloth-workers, once a centre of sheep farming. It was their wool that made the small town . . . and now, on the right, we are seeing the magnificent, red-brick garden wall of Long Melford Hall, with its yew fences clipped into the shapes of birds. The Hall, roofed towers and pinnacles, is of red brick. There is not another such hall in Suffolk – the home of the Hyde-Parkers. . . . Today the low sun gives the perfect light and shade for seeing this stately mansion of the past.

Already we have left the Green with its old houses at the top end – a row of Tudor almshouses, and behind them the church of all churches! Never have I seen it looking more beautiful than in the light of this October morning.

Still speeding through this Suffolk landscape – over a small bridge, the Stour and its placid waters below – we are coming to Cavendish: too small for a town – a very large village. Here is a church with a most beautiful tower with a bell-chamber staircase – a paintable church! The best time to see it is on the return journey, when the sun is westering. Then the staircase throws a great shadow on the flint walls of the tower and the lighting complements also the most perfect – and alas! uncared-for – group of thatched cottages on the Green. I know of no better grouping than those thatched, lime-washed cottages at the top end of the Green, clustered round the church. The old inn, alas! was replaced by a new one. It would be well worth an artist's while, if he calls himself a landscape painter, to spend a late summer and autumn in that village of Cavendish and make a picture of the church and cottages across the Green. An incomparable English scene! Alas! no cattle or sheep are about the Green, as of yore.

We are through Cavendish and passing a charming little Georgian house, the Hall – interesting to me because Mr Firth, the Newmarket Starter, lived there for some years. Now, I understand, it is the home of a well-to-do lady who seems to care for and look after it.

Still no sheep – and if ever there was a sheep-country this is it. . . . On the right a magnificent three-gabled farm-house – one of the best – now lived in (so I am told) by a lawyer.

How quickly we go! Too soon, alas! we are coming into the outskirts of Clare: another wonderful cloth town, with the usual old-fashioned garden walls. Turning right, we soon are going by the east end of one of the most magnificent Suffolk churches. As we roll along the High Street, with ancient houses on either side, looking back at the church one says, 'What a church!' It always leaves me in doubt as to whether its interior is better than those of Long Melford or Lavenham. The big tithe-barn – another relic of the past which stood in the street – has been pulled down and sent to America. This seems unbelievable, but is nevertheless true.

Now we are in a beautiful piece of Suffolk roadway. A small brook on the right runs through meadows, bordered by alders and willows. . . . We reach my favourite small house, a plastered farm-house, and the next one, which I call the French farm. The brook here runs at the very edge of the road, by a gabled, old-fashioned cottage. . . . On the left another venerable house, where a well-to-do farmer lives in a good way. . . . More old cottages . . . another old farm-house with buildings. . . . Running on between fences of autumn yellow and gold and large rolling fields, we climb to higher ground, where I get a thrill. . . . We pass a white signpost: 'To Kedington, 2½ miles' – and can see far across a wide agricultural landscape, smiling in the sun, with distant farm-gables bright in the light – the valley below and the little brook running at the bottom – the same that we passed a mile back. Now we come to, and pass, what I call Dilapidation Corner. Here, if we took it too seriously, we might be heartbroken for the rest of the journey at the sight of these stalwart, thatched, hoary cottages which have been left to fall to pieces – which even now, if money were spent on them, would last through centuries. The farm-house itself, once a wreck, has been restored to life; but what will happen to those great stacks of baled straw God only knows! There are too many stacks of baled and unbaled straw, which should go back to the land, in stackyards all over the country.

We are nearing Kedington, through a magnificent piece of agricultural landscape. It would be difficult to find better. . . .

I must stop at Canon Turnbull's lovely church . . . all the lime-trees in the little avenue are turned to gold. I enter the ancient, stone-cobbled porch. . . . Now I am once again in what I have already spoken of as the most unspoilt church¹ in Suffolk, if not in England. No pen can describe it. I hold one of the old grey oak pews and feel its texture – harder than marble . . . or steel. Each bench is at least two and a half inches thick. They were made centuries ago by workmen using – what sort of tools?

I close my eyes and try to see the building or workshop where they did this work . . . where they made the carved screen . . . the old Hall pew which was formerly the chantry screen. Although I bring my imagination to bear, I

¹ I have just heard from Canon Turnbull that four tons of lead have been stolen from the roof.

cannot begin to see. Of one thing I am certain: so long as the building is kept watertight this carved linen-fold screen and pews will be here as long as there is an England. The low sun streams through the windows on the south side, throwing great bars of light across the brick floor of the aisle . . . so strong are the beams that they almost hit one in the eye, so to speak.

A dim glimpse of the remote past appears as we look at altar tombs in the north aisle to Sir Thomas and Lady Elisabeth Barnardiston (*née* Newport). Sir Thomas died in 1503. Lady Elisabeth built the Tudor roof. All over these soft stone images are names carved by those who knew no better. I see one here, 1765 – another 1800 – another J.D. 1843. There are two sleeping figures on one tomb: a lady with her hands folded across, her husband with mailed hands together in prayer – W.W. 1791 has been carved on this one. . . . A niche to Lady Hanchett in a former Lady Chapel . . . a heraldic tablet. Here is another magnificent Jacobean altar tomb to Sir Thomas Barnardiston in armour, his first and second wives kneeling before their prayer-desks. Near the east window in the other transept a solitary Elizabethan lady kneels: 'Here lies the body of Grizell Barnardiston, daughter of Sir Thomas Barnardiston and Dame Anne, his wife, who died 27th June, 1609.' . . . But it is eleven o'clock and time to go . . . the first race is at one. . . . My last look was at the oldest of pence-boxes that ever was in a church – a butt of a tree embedded in the floor with wrought-iron hinge and lock and a slit for the pence . . . this could not be moved. We leave the church and travel onwards. . . .

Great piles of sugar-beet are lying ready for lorries to pick them up and take them to the factories . . . more goodness going out of the soil. They tell us that the beet-tops, which go back into the soil, are as good as farmyard muck. . . . If fed to milking-herds, little of it goes back. Thousands and thousands of tons of sugar-beet going away on lorries – part of the farm – on which they were grown.

We have just passed Wrattling Whalebone, with the jaw-bones of a whale outside the door . . . another village with its own particular look.

Again we are on top of the world, looking over a further expanse of agricultural landscape of fields and hedgerows. For miles on either side, as far as eye can see, is but one small portion of only one county, and yet they try to tell us that England cannot begin to feed itself. If such vistas of land as we have seen from horizon to horizon in this journey were farmed up to the hilt all over England, and stocked with sheep – cattle – pigs – the country *could* feed itself.

This village with a long street is Great Thurlow, where I once stayed with Fred Elwell, R.A., painting pigs. We used to dine in Thurlow Hall with Mr Ryder, a squire, who preserved foxes. On either side old cottage gables, all bright in the sun – more gables – more ancient thatch – more yellow foliage. . . . Now my eye is filled with yellow and gold . . . passing by great trees throwing their shadows across the road. Everything yellow and gold, yellow and gold! . . . Again we are looking across more and yet more interminable fields, plough . . . stubbles . . .

Sheep to the right! The second flock on the journey. . . . No! We're wrong – they are hundreds of bags of potatoes, gleaming in the sun in a far-away field. I have not lost that five shillings!

Here is a cottage with a garden. Masses of dahlias and chrysanthemums: crimson dahlias. What a sight! Just past Thurlow an inn: the Fox – the sign a running fox, a tired fox . . . a good painting, that sign.

Next comes a landmark . . . an old, ruined tower windmill on the summit of a hill. In spite of gales there are still remnants of the framework of its sails, its beehive top braving the elements – a round tower, its base far wider than its top – the saddest landmark on our journey. . . . Each time I pass I peer through the windows of the car to see it.

Hurrah! The driver has won five shillings. On the left – mark the position – a flock of sheep, near the turn to Brinkley.

Now we are mounting a hill between more gay fences of maple, in sight of Borough Green. . . . Past Borough Green . . . past the old school-house with the two ancient carved figures over an ancient door. Dullingham is in sight, its church tower, bright in the sun, showing over the fields. It has a peculiar little belfry on the top. . . . Between steep banks, shadows of trees are thrown across the road and up the right-hand bank.

We let the cars ahead of us go on to Newmarket – to the stands – but we turn off to the left. Again we can use superlatives. . . . Here is a small stretch of perfect road . . . ancient stone walls, ancient cottages . . . bars of light through yellow, sunlit foliage . . . long shadows thrown across the road . . . yellow leaves scattered on the ground . . . great piles of sugar-beet.

Dullingham station, and the railway gates. Will they be closed? – Through, past the gates. . . . Now we are in what I call the Newmarket country: the country of large, landed estates where one can see, far away in the distance, Ely Cathedral, and where the Fens begin. . . . Clumps of plantations in the centre of stubbles for pheasant-rearing . . . long rows of beech-trees.

Now through an avenue of beech-trees . . . and we are safe across the London road, with streams and streams of cars flying along in succession. . . . Next we are over the Cambridge road, with another endless stream of cars, all going to the Races. . . .

At the start of the third race I meet an old friend: a mounted gentleman on a very quiet Irish mare which he is schooling for a farmer. He has schooled hundreds and hundreds of horses in the past, and has ridden as many in horse shows, and was a friend of 'The Goblin'. Being well over seventy, he tried what is known as 'larking' home from hunting last week – so he tells me – and jumped into a lane, just missing a large heap of stones.

Also at the start was a familiar figure with a large black moustache, spectacles, bowler hat; very tall, stand-up, white starched collar, and dark-blue overcoat. He goes racing often; is retired from the Metropolitan Police and

lives at Clapham. From there he gets into a charabanc which brings him to Newmarket and takes him back for five and ninepence! The gentleman on the horse, working it out in his mind quickly, reckoned that the charabanc makes something like nine pounds carrying a number of people.

The first time that I met this seventy-six-year-old gentleman from Clapham, I said,

'You come from Norfolk!'

'O' course I dew,' said he.

Then I learned how, at the age of sixteen, he had been assistant ostler at the Golden Lion, St John's Maddermarket, Norwich, and rode a black pony at Bungay Races for his master, and won.

Asking him about his family, he told me that he had three daughters – two married – one living at home with him. He lost his wife a year ago.

'Where would you be,' I asked, 'in days like this without that daughter?'

'God knows!' was the reply.

Then he told me that children today are all spoilt – none of the girls grow up knowing how to cook. His granddaughter of eighteen disgusts him, because, as he said, 'she couldn't cook cold water'.

He also told me that whisky cost thirty-three shillings and fourpence per bottle, that he buys a bottle of whisky a month through some friend who is in a brewery. He had got a little bottle of whisky-and-lemon in the charabanc, which he was going to drink on the way back.

'When you were in the Metropolitan Police did you ever catch a burglar?' I asked him.

'Tain't so bloomin' likely,' says he. 'We kept clear o' them.'

This was part of a running conversation on the way from the Rowley Mile to the start of the five-furlong race: the Queensberry Handicap Stakes.

The morning, although sunny, showed a goodish scattering of cloud, which made me doubtful about what the sky was going to do. I wanted bright sun, and sure enough at the moment – about half-past two – there was not a cloud in the sky from horizon to horizon.

I am standing on the course – the most beautiful course in the world: cloudless October sky, a faint wind from the east. The field for the Cambridgeshire is coming along . . . a few waiting at the start. . . . The Starter is there. . . . I am looking at the scene, the old, old scene – a centuries-old scene. Horses come up the course looking like those of years ago – of the days of Archer – not so very different from those in the days of Eclipse. Bright colours in the sun just the same as of yore. Men on horses – the jockeys – their only difference is the fashionable seat, and the number-cloths are a new arrangement. . . . Now the jockeys are gathering at the post, the colours bright as they can be against the sky. A dark, good-looking horse – Sir Victor Sassoon's Master Gunner – lovely colours. Let me not forget to look at the whole thing, not

always trying to pick out good horses – a jockey in black silk with cerise cap on a big, superb horse. Number 18, Persia – lovely colours. . . . Flush Royal, Number 2, with Britt on him. . . . I don't like him. Coming across is Number 4, with Gordon Richards on him: Periscope III, in blinkers, colours black, cerise and buff hoops, black cap – lovely colours. Right in front of me, Number 10, white with rose cross-belts – Tribal Song. . . .

But never mind the horses, let me try to look at the colours. Number 11, Master Gunner again, Number 22, Kelling, lovely royal blue with pink quartered cap. Fastnet Rock, a very sober-looking grey – Lord Rosebery's horse, good colours – and Burnt Brown, almost a black, goodish horse. . . . What a sight for the artist! with the long shadows and the lights on the boots, lights on the horses. . . .

Now the horses are getting together. Number 15 – Zina – with young Piggott riding, already known to us. . . . They are forming up under Starter's orders. . . . Now they are massed on one side. . . . Here is a picture that I have looked at for years. . . . Now the jockeys are beginning to shout. . . . Number 1 – Hyperbole – trying to get into the row, and Number 22 – Kelling. . . .

This is the best picture I have ever seen – why can't I paint it?

The Cambridgeshire was won by Kelling, Douglas Smith riding. My race-card was given me by the man who drives the Starter's bus. Looking down it, I saw one horse marked on it: Kelling! He won at 100-6!

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Returning home . . . we are now beyond Borough Green, and the time is twenty past four, the sun only a short space to go before it drops over the horizon . . . shadows stretch the whole length of the fields. Going down a hill, into cool shadow – not a gleam of sunlight until we meet a rise; the tree-tops are lit . . . hedges are lit . . . there is a glow . . . the sun is sinking. We are ascending the hill with the old windmill on the top. . . . 'Good night, Windmill. . . .' Now we are in more open country, the sun still sinking lower. . . . A shadowed valley on the left, ploughed fields sloping downwards.

Now we see Great Thurlow church, a bright slash of light on its tower . . . the street in shade – tops of plastered gables in the light, fainter than they were on our journey this morning. Down the turning on the left is the farm-house where I painted pigs. About thirty sheep in a pasture on the left. . . . Another five shillings for the driver. We come to Wrattling and rising ground ahead . . . only fields sloping away on the left are catching the light. . . . Passing the Whalebone and on over the Bury St Edmunds-Haverhill Road, for Kedington and the bridge and the charming corner. Kedington church rose-coloured . . . everything fading away into grey and rose . . . nothing, only a faint blush touching 'the stubble plains with rosy hue'. . . . We have lost the sun. . . .

Between Kedington and Clare we reach the highest land of the journey, looking right across a stretch of Suffolk. In front of us an opalescent sky and a pale moon appearing. . . . Here we are on my favourite stretch near Clare.

Again the old, French-looking farm – the brook at the left side of the road . . . plastered farm-houses . . . cottage gardens, a mass of dahlias . . . nothing but yellow trees and pale stubbles . . . cornstacks clustering in farmyards . . . the sun gone, the moon growing plainer and brighter.

We are into Cavendish again, almost in twilight, with a full view of the north side of its noble church . . . old houses on either side, with the date 1400 on one. I had hoped for a last gleam lighting up the tower of the church, but it was too late, the moon still growing brighter.

Passing through the wide, undulating country with limitless fields and hedgerows, it is difficult to believe that this ground was once, only a few years ago, ploughed, drilled and harrowed by horses with men walking behind them. The soil of the churchyards cover the bodies and bones of those who have worked for hundreds and hundreds of years and walked hundreds and hundreds of miles behind horses whose hides have long been made into shoe-leather.

Long Melford street settling into twilight . . . smoke from the chimneys ascends into the still air . . . a rich afterglow on the clustered stacks silhouetted against the sky – the street assumes the ancient air of the past. Good night, Long Melford.

Towards Sudbury the Stour valley is on our right, and we are overhauling and passing the same herd going home that we so often see on these journeys – an artist's picture. All the trees and hedges a pale mauve against the afterglow, which, alas! is dying. Its colour is all too faint, whilst the moon on the left is now bright in a purple sky – 'and still the same, calm moon'.

Daylight almost gone as we travel on through a dream landscape, a faint dying glow still in the sky . . . the moon now luminous and bright. Headlights of cars . . . lights appear in cottage windows as we near Stoke. The tall, buttressed tower of the church has a greyish rose shade on its west side. . . . Everyone in the cottages getting their teas. . . .

We are going by Tendring Hall and its park. Down on the left is the beautiful valley of the Box river running along through Thorington – all merging into a moonlit landscape.

Ascending Higham Hill, passing Mr Bowcher's house, I catch a glimpse of the Daimler standing in the drive, and imagine him in his room having a late cup of tea – he in one chair, his dog in the other. . . . But I forgot – the other chair is full of *Sporting Lives*.

Passing Stratford Church, the moon now casting long shadows, we are nearly home, going through the lane towards Dedham . . . daylight completely gone . . . the moon, instead of the sun, throws long shadows. . . .

XLIX

RANDOM MEMORIES

WINE-TASTING IN A CELLAR

No matter the date, no matter the night. I have been to a dinner in Colchester. It is now five minutes to twelve. So still is the night the sound of clocks ticking – here, in the hall, in the next room – is plainly heard. The dominant sound comes from the tall clock in the hall. My wife has long been in bed and asleep.

Now, past midnight, I sit alone. When my Colchester friend left me and motored away I stood outside watching the black shadows cast by the shrubs and trees. Blacker than all was that of the old yew. Above, in a clear sky, 'the same bright, calm moon'. A faint sighing of wind through the bare branches of plane and beech. For what a short space of time do we dwell in a house and cling to its familiar surroundings!

Standing there, listening to the music of time – the wind through the trees, coming and dying so faint and again rising to a dirge – I thought of all the birds that I shall hear beginning to sing as soon as daylight comes. All were sleeping, and where? No answer to my thoughts; only the sighing of the wind. Yet the robins, the blackbirds, the chaffinches, the thrushes, the wrens, the tits, the sparrows were all fast asleep; somewhere!

My friend who had fetched and brought me home is a wine merchant. Not long after I had bought this house in 1919 my sculptor friend, Whitney-Smith, was staying with me. One day he and I went to the old-established wine merchant's shop in the High Street in Colchester and there made acquaintance of the two brothers. Both had been in the war; their father was dead, and they had followed him in the business.

Motoring to Colchester and back with my wine merchant friend tonight revived memories of the past, when my sculptor friend and I called at the old wine-shop, and in a great mood went down into the cellars with the two sons.

These cellars extended far under the High Street. There were rows of arched bins one above the other, on and on, with sherry, claret and port of all ages lying there in the dark.

Two or three days in succession we spent in the cellars, tasting. The oldest wine was a port 1820! All gone to white vinegar, excepting one or two bottles. I bought a quantity of Croft's 1851, in half bottles. Some Cockburns and Taylors, 1847, 1868, 1870 and 1884. Also, after much tasting, I settled to take dozens of East India Sherry 1875 and earlier. From the beginning of the tasting, with dry biscuits in between, we were in a state of bliss, always curious to taste the next sample. There was a lot of old Solera, too beautiful to write of.

For moments, as I stood outside this house in the moonlight, the tasting and sipping in the cellar came back to me. The few '68's were the best that I bought. But the '51 Crofts were good. My wine friend still has some Taylors 1900, which he is going to drink when he is fifty, this year. His regret is that his father had sold some dozens of magnums of '68 before he died.

Gloom dispelled with only a paraffin lamp. Dark arches grown over with cobwebs and thick growth of damp mould. . . . What is this lot? . . . An old leaden label affixed to a bottle, or some markings, guided the brothers. It was the 1820! I recall the scene: the first bottle being taken out of the labyrinth of cobwebbed and festooned growth of more than a century. The corkscrew gently turned in what was once a cork that crumbled away. We poured the wine out, and it was white! Again and again we tried. But afterwards a bottle with a wide-open neck which tapered and grew narrower was opened at a wine-tasting lecture or something, and was drinkable.

What sherry it was that I bought - pale, old, potent and dry. Old Solera! That was the best. Sixty-one.

But alas! I thought little of it then. We tossed it off, as if it were water, at my bachelor feasts.

Tonight on the way to Colchester my wine-selling friend reminded me of an occasion when they sent me in a bill for £71 when my foot, swathed up in hot towels, was resting in a chair. I was married then, and my wife said, 'Well, he's paid for it already, and now I hope he'll like paying for it again.'

Not a random memory; but an inspired warning written by my wife and laid at my bedside on my reaching the age of fifty.

Oh, Alfred, my son, husband, brother and (at times) friend; I implore thee to look after thy *HEALTH*. Thou art fifty years of age. *Half a century* hath thy flesh and bones lived and partaken of the joys and ills of this life. *BE THOU CAREFUL* that thou abusethest not the good health the Blessed Lord hath given thee!

Go unto thy Club seven times seven, but be not carried away by thy *generous* heart. Thou orderest wine in abundance to pour down the gullets of thy guests, but, oh, Alfred, I pray thee pour it not down thine own gullet.

To counteract these pleasures and wines that tickle thy palate, remember the hours thou givest to dreadful cures and the many times thou takest the

thinning waters of Vittell and other aperients, all for starving the blood and countering evils brought upon thyself by the effects of the night before! Believe me, these are the words of thy ever devoted wife, and I do beseech thee to abstain from and abhor these evils. If not, old age will fall upon thee! Thou wilt scratch, and thy hair become thinner, and thy belly bigger, and thy manners surlier!

Were I to pass to another world [and here I wept as I read], where the cares of an artist are unknown, who then would take care of thee? – Thy finance, thy household, thy health and thy belongings? Go thee more to the country to inhale God's pure air. To your dear horses! To rise with the lark and retire with the thrush. Live the life thy Lord prescribed for thee. Let the pure winds of heaven blow away thy irritations, both of mind and body, and after a few days, perchance weeks, return to the fetid atmosphere and excitement of London.

Yet your wife, who married thee for companionship, railleth not at thee; for life is full of compensations. Therefore, O my husband, I am contented to come second to thy Art, but I implore thee to regard thy fifty years spent in Art and work and revelry upon this earth, and whilst there is time *Take Heed!*

A MEMORY OF A HUNT WITH THE ESSEX AND SUFFOLK

Years ago, with the Essex and Suffolk Hunt, somewhere near a large common known as Barking Tye, I was galloping down a headland towards some stacks and farm buildings. Suddenly I saw a man approaching, his head bent low over the sight of a double-barrelled gun, which he was aiming at me.

Pulling up my horse, I cried, 'For God's sake, don't shoot!'

'I will,' said the man – the farmer of the land.

'My good fellow, don't commit murder,' said I.

'If you don't git off my land right now, I bloody well will shoot ye, ye b——!' roared he, his eye glinting behind the barrels pointing straight at me.

And as I rode to the gate, those twin barrels and the eye followed me. Two friends of the hunt were watching from the other side of the fence.

'He's a rum fellow,' said one; 'he'd shoot ye for twopence!'

Through the gate and stack-yard, past the horse-pond and buildings, he followed me, with his weapon at full cock, until I was off his land.

With a sigh of relief I rode away with those who had kept off his fields and learned that he was against the Hunt.

'He's a sour chap,' said the Master. 'You'll have to go and see him and sweeten him up tomorrow.'

Next morning, taking a bottle of whisky with me, I went to pay my call, and on the way through Ipswich, bought a good fork and spade and hedge-cutting tools.

With a map, I found the farm. It lay far away from anywhere, in the midst of heavy clay-lands – desolate, lonely, at the end of an endless, deep, bottomless grass lane between thick thorn fences a hundred years old. This was the only

approach to a place inaccessible to car or delivery van. Leaving the car at the lane's entrance, my driver and I, carrying the whisky, spade and fork and tools, plodded between waterlogged ruts to the farm.

In spite of its solitude, the buildings, barn, stacks and outhouses had a neat, cared-for appearance. There was a comfortable, strawed yard full of young stock. There were pigs in sties, squealing for food; two old-fashioned cows chewing their cuds by a gate; fowls everywhere, scratching and picking about the place.

Hearing somebody in the turnip-house, I peeped, and found a strange, uncouth little figure in a long, soiled coat tied round the waist with cord. On its head a greasy old hat, with a black-and-white check woollen scarf tied over it, and round the wearer's throat. She – for it was a woman – was chopping swedes on the floor.

I slipped off to the house unseen by this phenomenon, and knocked on the back door, which was opened by a saner-looking body – the wife.

'Where's your husband, ma'am?' said I.

'He's down that field there; you'll see him if you go through the gate.'

Going into the field, I saw the man I was seeking, at work with a horse and tumbrel, and went up to him.

'Hullo, sir,' I cried. 'I'm the fellow who rode down your headland yesterday.'

'You are, are ye?' said he.

'My dear man,' said I, 'I'm sorry if I did any harm.'

He was a good soul; a worker, and, as I soon found, he loved the land.

'If you go to the house I'll be along in a minute with these faggots,' said he.

I now had time to look at that ancient farm-house, surrounded on two sides by a moat. Not too large or too small, it stood there, sheltered from the north winds by elm-trees and pollarded oaks and ash, which, like the house, were centuries old.

Like so many farm-houses, it was built in the shape of an L, its two staunch, cream-washed gables facing south and west. The usual large elder-bushes were in the right place. Ducks were on the moat, and hens near the kitchen door.

As I gazed with all due reverence at the farmer's home, the back door opened and the wife asked me in and gave me a hot cup of tea in the big, low-beamed kitchen, with its wood fire and singing kettles. She then showed me into the parlour, where we were joined by her husband, a sturdy man of sixty or so, clean shaved, with side whiskers. His honest, weather-worn countenance was all in keeping with his home.

'Who is the gentleman over the mantelpiece?' I asked, looking at an enlarged, framed photograph of a grand old man in a black silk hat.

'He's my old guv'nor – a veterinary who I used to drive about in London. I was his groom for years afore I bought this place.'

The picture gave fresh interest as he told me of his life in London and how he saved money, and the old man left him a bit. When I had listened to his story of how he bought the place in ruinous, neglected state with seventy acres

for next to nothing, he took me out into the buildings and barn to look at all his stock, young and old.

On every side I saw his handiwork. Neat rails, cut from the small wood near by, made strong partitions in the warm barn. All was ship-shape and comfortable.

Then the strange figure of the little woman appeared going across the yard. 'Who's she?' I asked.

'I bought her with the place. She was livin' in it alone,' said he. 'She gets a letter once a month with money and keeps herself in a room and helps me here with the stock.'

I could say no more. Here were people, happy, contented; the man and wife who had lived in London for years, and the strange little muffled-up woman who had never left Suffolk, their sole companion in the house.

One man and boy helped on the farm.

I see the farmer now in the barn, and I hear him saying from the bottom of his heart, 'I love th' old place.' Then I showed him the spade, fork and tools and the bottle of whisky, and asked him to accept.

He thanked me bluntly and I saw we were friends and could understand him not wanting the Hunt on the place which he had brought to life with the sweat of his brow.

Before leaving I was talking with his wife in the yard.

'Yes,' she said, 'I'm fond of the house; but it's a rum old place in the winter. When the moon's full, them old buildings throw black shadows in the yard and on the moat, and give me the creeps.'

I pictured the scene. A perfect description after de Maupassant's own heart. And so I left them and plodded back, full of thought, down the deep, rutted lane to the car.

Returning there often, I bought the best-dressed fowls and home-made butter I have ever eaten. What of the price of the butter? One and eightpence a pound!

These folk needed no cinema, and went to bed tired and slept, whilst outside, when the moon was full, the black shadows from the buildings lay on the brightly lit yard, and all was silent as the grave.

NOTES WRITTEN IN A SKETCH-BOOK

On a perfect July morning, I am sitting up on a scorched grass slope by a mill pool. Close to this spot, more than a century ago, Constable saw a subject and made his first sketch for one of the world's best landscapes known as 'Stratford Mill'.

His name and work are so familiar, so English, that we are slow to accept the fact that he has gone farther in the painting of a country's landscape than any other artist, and that his work still reigns supreme.

In his sketches there is the spirit of the poetry of Nature – of intense swift realism, of fleeting beauties of changing skies and weather.

So well did he understand those effects, so clear was his vision, so sure his hand and eye, that he mastered with ease subtle problems that were beyond other men.

As sure as I am sitting here today, Constable did actually make his painting-ground by this pool for many an afternoon during an August of long ago.

The scene as he knew it has long since vanished. On the site of the old Stratford Mill, a tall new one of white brick was erected, and flourished in Victorian days. From making flour it sank to making macaroni. Then for years it stood there, a ruined shell. Now it has gone, and near by, a strange, Egyptian-looking structure has arisen to remind us of the deterioration – the prostitution of architectural tradition. The building is one of the eyesores of the valley – a pumping-station that goes on taking water from the Stour to South London day and night.

In front of me is a peaceful scene of water, rushes, trees and sky – a piece of river landscape that I should never tire of watching. And, being in the mood, let me lie here, undisturbed awhile, listening to the sound of leaves moving in the wind, of water running through a sluice and the scent of mown hay coming from the flat meadows across the river, where it lies in long, pale, curving swaths.

Patches of white froth move slowly with the current on the purply-blue surface of the deep pool.

Tall trees, their edges lit around by the sun, are reflected in the water, and two swans – the same that I saw in the winter – are posing in the right spot for me, were I painting the scene. And now, a fresher, stronger breeze sends a track of ripples across the pool, cutting the dark tree reflections in two. On my right is a raised wooden footbridge over the river leading to a path along the hayfield, and on through more and more vistas of meadows with groups of poplars and rows of willows.

Having had a pint of shandygaff in the old inn across the road, I lie here and dream, listening to the twitter of birds, the whispering reeds and murmur of water through the sluice, without a thought of tomorrow – forgetting the world and the turmoil of fast traffic on roads.

Oh! you soft summer breezes come again and again and fan my face. The sunlight and sounds of trees and water are all too perfect to be true. Yet the scene is there, and now one swan is close to me in the foreground. The lines of a swan – those pure white curves – reached perfection ages ago.

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How different the scene yesterday! My wife and I attended the opening of the Colchester Festival which took place as the clock on the Town Hall struck eleven. After trumpeters of the Black Watch in Highland dress had sounded a fanfare and church bells had ceased pealing the Lord Lieutenant of the

County, the Mayor and the Bishop made speeches from a balcony facing the street. Then came my turn to open an exhibition of old pictures lent by folk who are still able to live in country houses in the district. I doubt if many in the Moot Hall who heard me talking of the qualities of some of the exhibits were interested, or understood what I endeavoured to say. After a civic lunch, followed by more speeches, my wife and I with other folk went across to the Castle to see an exhibition of work by artists of today. Ghosts of Romans who built the Castle must have sighed – even as do these sedges that I hear on the river-bank – at the sight of that exhibition of the *École de Colchester*. They were mostly imitation Chagalls and Braques.

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Last night, after dinner, I went across the meadow to the studio where I had not been for weeks; put on the light and attacked a horse's head and neck in a big picture and made it more alive – or thought I had done so. I turned to get out more brushes; and seeing the picture again a moment after, all looked wrong – appalling! Again I attacked it until I thought it excellent and turned it round to the wall. Then after cleaning palette and brushes I looked at my watch and saw it was 1.45 am. For more than four hours had I been scraping out and repainting a horse's head! Such efforts make us look with a keener eye when again in front of Nature! Somewhat dazed, I recrossed the paddock in the dark. The silence held me in a spell and I thought of all the birds sleeping near me.

As my eyes became accustomed to the light, there were the old familiar shapes of trees which soon would be no longer mine. I thought of the future – 'The future a sealed seed plot'.

Then I went up to bed and slept until 6.30, woke and looked at Cherry Ripe's picture and slept once more and dreamt. . . . At last wide awake I thought that after such an overnight struggle in the studio I had earned a day out. I would ring up for Colchester Rolls and go to Aldeburgh and eat shrimps on the pebbled shore. No; there was a delicious wind making music through the plane-tree's foliage. I would find a spot where I could hear it among poplars by the river, and here I am. . . .

A week or two ago I stood by the start of the first race at Newmarket; the apprentices' race. Mr Macdonald Buchanan, one of the Stewards, was there with the Starter, and he came over to me and asked what I thought the large Constable landscape of 'Stratford Mill' would fetch at Christie's the following week. I told him, 'As much, or more than it made at the Swaythling Sale, which was 40,000 guineas.'

'And the Stubbs pictures,' said he. 'The one of Gimcrack. Will it make 6,000, do you think?'

'Double that,' said I. 'And what is more, if I had a house like Cottesbrook Hall, and a collection like that which Lord Woolavington left behind him, I would buy the Constable and all of them.'

'You would?' said he.

'Without hesitation, whatever the cost,' was my answer, never dreaming that he was going to do it.

But he did. In the following week the papers were full of the Hutchinson Sale and his purchase of the 'Stratford Mill' picture for 42,000 guineas and the Stubbs for 12,000. He also bought one of mine, 'An Ascot Postilion'. How well I remember painting it!

My other pictures sold well, smaller works making four times the price I got for them.

To return to my spot where I still lie in the sun – I try to picture the scene with Constable wandering about by the old Mill, seeking and seeing his subject. In the scene he has set upon canvas we are aware of life in the Mill behind him as he sat making his studies to the sound of the water-wheel.

Mooning around as artists do, there on a summer's day he saw the lads fishing and a barge lying by the farther bank. The river then gave life to the country in the full sense of the word. It turned many mills, bore laden barges up and down its length between Sudbury and Harwich, and watered the long, wide valley where grazing stock drank at its edge, where rows of pollarded willows grew and were cut and grew again.

Although we know Constable's portrait and his paintings, how can we visualize him at work out of doors – or in? I fancy I see him there – the sound of the mill going on and on – the boys fishing; men coming and going from the mill – barges passing up through the lock to Langham or Nayland.

It is a Constable day of soft breezes and clouds, of sunlight and shadows. . . .

But I must go on over the bridge to Langham, where once stood another mill that Constable knew so well. Alas! all is gone – never to come back.

The spell is broken; I walk over the wooden bridge and across the hayfield with pale, scented swaths of hay lying in curved rows. The footpath is bordered by meadowsweet along the rushy dike. What scents and sounds are in the breeze as I stop at the gate on the far side of the meadow. . . .

Had the picture 'Stratford Mill' made double the sum that the artist received for it, and had it remained in the home where it was first hung, it would have sunk into oblivion.

Only its fantastic figure of 43,000 guineas – not its fine qualities of paint or achievement of the impossible, its flash of genius – stirred the dull minds of his countrymen.

If we believe in a future life where there is compensation for 'the whips and scorns of time', then Constable indeed received his compensation in full when his spirit quitted this world and the scenes he loved to paint.

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October 17th 1951 – the day of the Cesarewitch; a celebrated, long-distance race with a large field, won by Three Cheers.

As usual for me, the start was a picture, gone all too soon! At the start of an earlier race this day I saw Mr Macdonald Buchanan. I had not seen him since the July Meeting when we talked of the coming sale of the Hutchinson pictures at Christie's. He told me that the Academy had asked for the loan of the picture 'Stratford Mill' for their coming winter Exhibition. And so, once more, Constable's masterpiece will hang in an Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts in company with the works of the great President of his day, Sir Thomas Lawrence, and many others.

A century and a quarter has passed since it was first shown in the Academy. The artist did not sell it there. A friend gave him £100 for it. During the last few years it has changed hands twice.

Once in the Swaythling collection sale at Christie's it was sold for 40,000 guineas, over four hundred times as much as the artist received for it, and last July it was sold again, fetching 42,000 guineas.

Had Constable only received the amount paid to Messrs Christie's as commission on the sales, he would, in those far-off days, have been rich indeed!

Alas! How long is the appreciation of true Art!

Now that his genius has long fled, scores of dealers make large profits from small sketches and pictures by Constable. Highbrows who write twaddle about the moderns and the rest, spin out long articles and books on his painting of skies alone.

Without a vestige of understanding of paint, or of the genius of such a man, they would argue that he, like Picasso, was a pioneer, an innovator of new movement! Once more I say with fervour, God help us!

AN AUTUMN RIDE

One more country ride to go in this my last book. 3rd October 1951.

When I cut my lengthy book in two I did not realize that there would be respite of some months before its chapters went to press.

So I insert this with others in 'Random Memories'.

To quicken my dull brain, I resort to a bottle of lately discovered elixir.

A short time ago Slocombe and I were looking for a rat which Toby the mongrel insisted was there. Toby has the best nose in the parish – in the county. We tore down the wood facing beneath a corner manger of a large loose-box or shed which opens into the front meadow.

With crowbar, the wooden slabs were wrenched out, whilst Toby, berserk – mad with rage – tore, scrapped, fought, and at last killed the rat: a big one. I come to my point. Lying beneath dust, hayseeds and rubbish were bottles!

A secret horde that I had forgotten! (This is part of my life-story, and no digression, although I started out to write of a ride on an autumn day.) Those dusty, long-forgotten bottles in the three-cornered space beneath the manger told their story, and a glimpse of mine!

Seeing them there, lying one on the other – some long-shaped hock bottles – brought strange memories back to me. A 1938 New Year's party! When everyone had gone, myself busy decanting all the left-over punch into bottles and laying them in the cellar in peace. The war came, and before the Army took over the house, by night I moved the good wines that were left in the cellar to various hiding-places. Dozens of port did I carry across to the studio, lifting a piece of loose floor-board which was there for a purpose, and placing bottle after bottle as far under the floor as I could reach, laying one over the other. There were not many dozens to hide, because already conditions were changing for folk like ourselves. I was no duke, with 500 dozen of this vintage or that in his cellars.

However, Toby had killed the poor rat that had brought about the discovery of the bottles.

For eleven years the horde of punch and hock had laid there undisturbed!

May I confess – this being almost my last addition to this book – that a moment ago I went to the cellar and opened one of those bottles of punch, and I am writing this under the inspiring influence of 'a draught of vintage that hath been cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth'. And now to resume with the help of punch. I was about to write of a long ride on a horse – a horse that has carried me in a seventh heaven of happiness all day. As I rode, a state of bliss descended upon me – upon us both, horse and self, as we became accustomed to the rich colour and stillness of a Saint Martin's summer day.

First of all, Slocombe drove myself and horse in the horse-box to a secret arcadia. Taking off the tail bandage and getting on the horse, I thanked Tom, who had set me on my way, and rode up a long, grass-grown lane between high fences, all gaudy yellow and crimson. As we sauntered along I marvelled at the gorgeous resplendence of Nature in autumn mood – and what a day of pure clear sunlight of serene calm, without a sound, excepting for the report of distant guns in a pheasant shoot. A day becalmed; the trees motionless! Summer resigning itself in tranquillity to autumn.

My horse trod on a carpet of yellow leaves. On either side the fences glowed with scarlet hips, where but a few months ago wild roses were growing in profusion. The brilliant light poured through yellow fences and across the lane which led at last to wide, pale stubbles – miles of stubble, fences and oaks, and elms, some still in their garb of dark summer foliage, turning to gold here and there.

The day was too precious and still to tempt horse or man into a gallop, or even a canter or jog-trot. Spraying, jetting fountains of yellow elm in the hedgerows continued the length of field after field, interrupted here and there with crimson glories of wild cherry or dark holly.

The brushing of the horse's hooves through the 'crackling stubbles' and cawing of distant rooks were the only sounds that broke the intense autumn calm.

Coming into a lane, I met an acquaintance – an eighty-year-old gamekeeper

– trudging along, staff in hand, like a youth of twenty. We recalled a day when my stud groom and I, schooling two young horses, met him by a gate in a woodland ride.

‘This way has been stopped; you can’t pass through the gate,’ said he.

‘But surely, now we’ve come so far, you’ll let us through. Besides, I’ve met you here often, and we’re old friends.’

‘Nol’ he replied, ‘you must go back.’

‘If I were a lord, you’d let me through,’ said I.

‘No, damn’d if I would,’ said he.

‘But I’m not a lord,’ said I.

‘No,’ he replied, ‘and you don’t look like one either.’

I all but fell off my horse as I wept with laughing – he laughing, too.

‘Well, you can go on if you want to,’ said he, opening the gate, and every time we meet – he’s now retired and lives in a lodge – we remind ourselves of the scene.

Bidding him adieu, I rode on until, just after one o’clock, I made a point – a farm-house – and stopped and hailed the farmer’s married daughter who was looking through the window.

‘Where’s the old boy?’ I asked.

She opened the window and answered, ‘He’s coming out.’

In his half-crown black felt hat, he came to the gate. Each year I note that he grows older.

‘What a grand lot of red polls and what a bull you have in the meadow up the road,’ said I.

‘Yes: I bred the bull. He’s a good ‘un.’

‘How much happier and better is a bull, running free, out with the cows,’ said I.

‘Ahl liberty – freedom! that’s best,’ he replied, and so we talked, and I asked him if he still remembered Gray’s *Elegy* – his favourite poem and mine.

‘Indeed I do, for I say it to myself almost every night before I sleep,’ said he.

‘Why’, I asked, ‘cannot children in our schools be guided to a love and understanding of our great British poets, of our soil and the miracles about us?’

‘Every morning’, said my friend, ‘a big bus leaves the place and takes the children to school at Hadleigh – takes ‘em away from all this beauty and the village, to be taught by teachers who know nothing of the country, many of whom are teachers because of the long holidays.’

How true he spoke! Only a month ago – on Newmarket Heath watching the horses – I saw a stout, grown woman – a farmer’s daughter who used to hunt with her father in the Essex and Suffolk country. She was a widow, and had bought a house in Newmarket. Her young daughter was with her, and I asked what the girl was going to do.

‘Make her cook and help you in the house,’ said I.

'She's going to be a teacher; aren't you, Mary?' was the reply. 'And why? Because teachers get longer holidays in a year than anyone else.'

To resume the scene of the discussion between the aged farmer and myself. 'But let us forget all about this rotten education, sir,' said I, 'and talk about Gray.'

'Oh, my word!' said he. 'Nearly every night I say it through to myself. The whole scene might have been laid here: the lowing herd – the ploughman. . . . Many's the time, years ago, I've seen him plodding "his weary way" home across the bit of park by the church of an evening. What lines they are! And all written by a man who knew what he was writing about.' Then he began:

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:

And again he quoted with love and fervour:

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn

And here I joined in, sitting on the horse that was quite indifferent to our quoting, and reciting, with hand in air, wielding a crop:

The swallow twitt'ring from the straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

At last we parted and riding along I thought, 'What of the inn farther on – the Cock?'

And so I reached the Cock, which I call the Smuggler's Inn, where we artists and Garrick Club friends used to assemble and fraternize on a Sunday noon –

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife . . .

Only the landlord was there! Not even my friend – a philosophic son of the soil – a solitary bachelor who does for himself. And standing the landlord a drink, and having one myself, I grew friendly to all, and left money with him to ask the night assembly to drink with my absent self.

Then down the hill and through the small piece of park in full autumn garb; out at the top end by the Knoll, where stands an ancient oak, and so down a narrow, remote lane, with the afternoon sunlight blazing through more overgrown yellow fences, to a ford and a footbridge over a placid stream. There my horse stopped, and, after being sure that no lions or tigers were crouching near to spring upon him, he put his head down and drank, whilst I took an apple from my coat pocket. Doing this, something fell into the water. It was my pencil – a bright yellow 3B, Hardtmuth pencil – slowly floating away downstream. Dismounting, I brought it with my crop to where I stood, and then, taking invitation cards from my pocket, which I carry with me at races for making notes, I began to write what I saw, as I often do, remembering that Gray once said: 'A note on the spot is worth a cartload of recollections.'

Let me now recall the scene whilst the elixir from the hidden bottle still prompts me.

My horse and I are at the bottom of this steep, unfrequented lane, enjoying its solitude as we stand by a ford in a clear, translucent stream. Across it, the lane carpeted with yellow leaves, and on the right side of the lane a rough, overgrown elm fence, at least some twenty feet high, a blaze of yellow, the bright sunlight pouring through it on the leaf-strewn ground. On my left – this side of the stream – is the ending of the ancient deer park, a paradise of rich colour, and from it comes a cawing of rooks mingling with the staccato cries of jackdaws. And but for the sound of their cawing, all the countryside lies in a silent spell of late summer passing to autumn in deep calm, mellowness and splendour. And I recall Tennyson's lines as I always do at this time and on this spot: They will bear quoting again:

And Autumn, with a noise of rooks,
That gather in the waning woods,

And again:

Calm and deep peace in this wide air,
These leaves that redden to the fall
And in my heart, if calm at all,
If any calm, a calm despair.

Mounting the horse once more and riding through the stream I wander on, trying to fathom the soundless peace of the day nearing its end, all too soon. My horse treads on yellow leaves and, going uphill towards a spinney and beneath overhanging autumn foliage, bright sun rays pour through a yellow screen of trees and fence, flicking my face, dazzling the sight; and, farther ahead, broad bursts of light flood the lane and strike the left bank, making thousands of sparkling diamonds on thousands of polished leaves of ivy climbing about the slope.

I am smitten through, as I ride, at the sight of yellow sprays of low elm-boughs drooping overhead, blazing bright in the rays of the low sun.

Autumn glory upon distant woods: upon oak, elm and beech and hedges, and in the very roads and lanes where yellow leaves lie thick.

And so we move slowly along sloping meadows and by farms – the expiring autumn day resigning itself to a brooding spell; the shadows lengthening, and frost already in the air.

So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Whether I have earned it or not, I help myself once more to the elixir: the hidden punch of New Year's Eve, 1938.

Reading this over – my wife says it's nothing . . . only yellow trees and fences and leaves! That is exactly what my ride has been.

MEMOIRS OF THE RIVER

Until I pass out I shall always long for the river and the warblers' song going on and on, and now and then the wind through the willows turning the surface blue and purple. — Then comes the first breath of autumn, and the willows still whiten, and the lines of the wooded horizons are dark and lowering, and the glory of the river-herbs is dying, and the long, decaying stalks of river-parsley lie yellow, straggling along the current, caught up by some standing rushy clump, sending the stream in wrinkles, and leaving eddies on either side. . . . And the wind comes in gusts, and the blown water is steely and puffed this way and that by unseen spirits, and swallows are gathering, and course and twist at speed on the surface.

My home was on a river. The Waveney, which divides Norfolk from Suffolk. Now, when I'm often far from it, my one desire is to find time, which I never can, to write about it and browse back on the past, to picture its lovely mills, each in turn, and lastly one of the largest on the river — our mill where we lived.

On the map, the Waveney rises on one side of a road over a fenny valley, and the Ouse on the other. Going east, the Waveney passes Diss, and the first mill in my remembrances is Hoxne. There was a paradise in miniature for anyone. Poplars, willows, a narrowing valley with arable lands sloping to the meadows. In June fences were white with May. The meadows along the river a blaze of yellow buttercups and daisies. Alders, willows and an occasional large Normandy Poplar or two seemed planted in design for the landscape painter, and the mill itself, small, white, gazing upstream, a dream of a place; and well I knew it, for I worked there, and lodged in a farm close by each summer for two or three years. Days of work, beyond description, when my income was small, when nothing mattered. I could devote chapters to Hoxne alone.

Lord, keep my pen in some order! I deviate too much — that mill at Hoxne, in placid surroundings, with its summer sound of pattering poplar leaves mingling with a constant hum of great grinding within its wooden walls, is now a week-end place.

On a bright morning, with white clouds sailing over the willows, and to the sound of mill and stream, I have seen the miller's man, white with flour, leaning with arms on the top rail of the bridge, imperturbable, always gazing upstream — his eye missing nothing. Then, after painting awhile, should I look that way again, he would be gone in. Later, just before midday, he would be there again, gazing now up at the clouds, now over the meadows, and perhaps his pipe going. He was a good fellow, grown exactly to type. And there was the carter with the mill-cart and horse — he was white, too; and then there was the miller, of very few words, who lived in the little Mill House, grown up with roses and honeysuckle.

And if you passed through a gate to the right of his little house, the path led along meadows made narrow through the river's course winding close to the arable uplands, which sloped in places, golden with corn in August, to the river. There was an osier-bed where warblers sang the day through, and one or two dark deep holes at bends of the river. The next mill, a larger one, not so well known to me, was a mile or so down, at Syleham, hidden amongst ash and poplar trees. Farther on was Needham, now a dwelling-house. After this Weybread. Burnt down: a lovely mill with a large, pleasant house away from it in a garden. Then came our mill: Mendham. The valley is flat and wide here, and you see the mills from a distance. They were large mills, working with water-power or steam. Like the rest, they are dead, and this is now a luxuriant river-side dwelling. £20,000 has been spent on it. Its machinery gone, our old home itself now contains the electric and heating plants. In one of those rooms my father used to say family prayers every morning, leaving us often on our knees as he went to the door and mounted the front wheel of a wagon of wheat, sample in hand, to compare the sample with that delivered. We could see him at this through the window, then the wagon drew on with 'All right', and back came father, and praying began again – as I described earlier.

A sense of wrong holds me now if I go near this luxury abode, once a mill. I lived to the hum of its grinding. The summer time, blue river and the yellow, flooded, roaring monster of winter, and all its happenings were part of our lives. Horses in the cart stable; horses in the nag stable; cows in the meadows; pigs all over the place. Flocks of ducks on its stream – swallows built nests under the eaves of the house, and all the way along under the tall eaves of the mill.

Ah, those flat, calm islands of water-lily leaves patterned on the surface on Sunday mornings, when no stream ran and all was still and everything glistened, and little 'sailor' insects, as we called them, wove in and out on the surface in groups. Blue dragon-flies. Arrow-heads standing up in legions sparkling in the sun. But how calm! Let me go quietly here; so much comes at once. Behind me, the tall, large, white mills with rows of blinking windows – three storeys of them. Over the 'Lukem', as it was called, where the sacks were hauled up on a chain from the wagons below was a weather-vane – N.S.E.W. – and a large fish to point the wind.

With the mill behind me, I stand on its bridge, about forty feet wide, across the mill-stream, which narrows under the bridge, flowing all the week over the broad wheel – now still. No peace like this slumbering Sabbath calm of a water-mill. – None. To begin – on the right side, the stable yards widen out from the bridge; beyond these and the stack-yards are meadows and marsh, and across the valley slopes of arable farming country mark the horizon. Over that horizon half the tower and four spires of Redenhall Church are showing. The right side of the stream is kitchen and flower-garden, with some kind of vine on the stable gable facing the river. A tall, large apple-tree – our great Doctor Harvey tree, as it was called – stands farther on amongst potatoes or

celery, or whatever it is. There are raspberry canes and gooseberry bushes. We hid under these canes ages ago. Our world lay all around us, and no farther, for years. When we read Rider Haggard or Fenimore Cooper, Zulus, bison and Indians were about there. We were pirates on the faggot-heaps, and we turned the mill-boat into a skull and crossbones pirate. Alas! 'The past is over and fled.'

Then came the flood-gates and their roaring of waters in the winter floods and in the spring the eel-nets and the great eels caught. The fast-moving yellow, raging water, foaming out in the flood-gate hole, racing along to join yet another stream flowing on round the north meadows, and farther on below the mill meeting the mill-stream itself.

Then on over the flood-gates bridge, under the boughs of a large ancient fir-tree, and into the orchard, with the river on our left dammed high, and the boat-house opposite on the other bank. The property ended on that side with the weir, always called the Float – why, I know not – and this had a board across in dry weather to keep the water at high level, and in ordinary times it was lifted. Back again to the bridge. On the left the Mill Lane runs down to the mill – about a quarter of a mile of it – from the road above. Cottages stand by another stream which the lane crosses to the mill. The meadows on the left stretch away to the village. Peaceful enough it looks, with the heavenly light of a summer's day over all, and in the mill meadows the cart-horses are enjoying these hours to the full: one rolling with heavy heels in the air – I see it all so plainly. In front of the house, on the left of the bridge, is the lawn or garden, with two large weeping ash-trees at the end, and the boat-house. The weeping ash nearer the river is so large that its boughs hang over the fence and trail in the current. Inside is an arbour with a green table and seats. Teas in the arbour were heavenly. I remember our brown wheat loaves, the cakes – sometimes ham or sausage rolls, with cream in the tea, if all was well or guests were staying. What days! Great, healthy girls to work and do in the house. Always there were Pollys and Sarahs and Nellys or Marys. Gone, these places – gone, and in their stead the great mass-production flour-mills at the ports.

This peaceful Sabbath, with bells chiming – and now they cease. . . . I look across the meadows to the church standing amongst the elms, and see my brothers and myself going along the footpath, hurrying as the chiming ceases and the single tolling bell goes on. Now through the Lion yard, and round by the Church Lane, up the churchyard path. Folks have all gone in. – The usual group of men and boys stand outside the porch. Hands in pockets, flowers in the hats of some; boots polished; velvet jackets very old, or black broad-cloth and black wide-awake hats – there they stand, a stolid expression on their faces; hard-living, wrongly treated remnants of a fine race of husbandmen, well and strong, in spite of all evils and all depressions – well and strong in spite of earning nine shillings a week and bringing up a family. Hardly one could write his own name; yet each was skilled on a farm, and his work was life to him. They, the horses and cattle all one; and how let down and misused!

Turned off commons, living in cottage dwellings, seldom repaired, on low wages. Now the drift away has happened, though partly stemmed by badly built Council cottages which, all over the country, could be styled as a disgrace to any nation. These are often built with no regard to appearance or homeliness, and are rented out of all proportion.

Now we, the congregation, are seated, and in clatter the men and boys to the north and south aisles. The organ plays; the old parson, Mr Brereton, begins, and so through to the end, when we all troop out, and gossip goes on awhile, until each and all go off again by this road and that path home to Sunday dinner.

At home there would be a grand cold sirloin of beef and horse-radish. I had seen the groom, Saxby, come round with horse-radish to the back door. In fact, I'd heard father call out to Saxby, 'Saxby' – 'Yes, sir' – 'Go and get some horse-radish.' 'Right, sir.' When we had a governess we went long walks. Often to an old ruined Saxon minster. Since then I have walked there alone, and have sat and mused, full of thoughts and memories, wondering at the distance of time, and if we had really been there, and if we ever climbed into the deep, clay-field ditches to pluck primroses, or walked each Good Friday to gather wood anemones in Homersfield wood! On Good Fridays! When the willows were turning a delicate green, and marsh marigolds grew along the river, the reed-beds, pale yellow in the sunlight, and the river-meadows not quite recovered from the winter flooding, with flood-marks of debris scattered along the banks. Harrowing and rolling always started on Good Friday. I smell the harrowed grass now. Then Whit Sunday. All different. Bright, sacred light, I felt it was – pouring down, glistening on the grass. The carthorses out at ease; the church and elms shimmering in the distance through the atmosphere of peace. White may-blossom on the thorn-trees and fences. Apple orchards in bloom – distant chiming bells from far and near. The peal from Redenhall over the hill coming and dying on the wind: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8, and so on, and changing. Magnificent. I write no more. I fail to go farther, for the word Redenhall crowds my mind with memories of school, to which we walked each day. A crowd of happenings go with this shut-up case of days.



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TO CONCLUDE

THIS book must be brought to an end and I am determined to bring it about tonight, 24th January 1951. In November last year publication of the first volume¹ interfered with the completion of this, which was cut into two volumes, this being the last. Glancing back to a turmoil of interruptions, I recall that the truest pleasures were letters from those who read the book and wrote to me about it. A small stream of letters is still coming daily. I thank all the kind writers of such letters, and wish I could invite them to a good dinner, or even a feast of the past of sausages-and-mash, and thank them for all they said.

Already the scenes of the birth of Volume I grow faint – a lingering touch of gout reminds me of the sherry party of The Times Book Club on the eve of publication. Only a glimmering of Television glares – of a dinner or two – a lunch or two – remains. Glowing through it all, the brightest spot, next to the letters, is the scarlet-coated toastmaster at the Foyle Literary Luncheon held just before Christmas to celebrate the publication of *An Artist's Life*. The memory of his clear, superb voice, 'which like a silver clarion rung', so moves me that I look around for a glass of something and, what is more, I am tempted to finish this book with an informal address, or Art talk to readers who may be interested. I promise myself that I will write it down as if I were speaking to you; making no alterations. The stupidest man on earth would be able to speak after that red-coated, brass-buttoned, white-waistcoated announcer. I hear him saying, 'My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen! pray silence for Sir Alfred Munnings!!'

Rising, I address my readers:

'Ladies and Gentlemen. I begin with an Art event – not too far off – which happened only a few weeks ago. My wife and I were invited by the Mayor – or Town Reeve – of Bungay to what is known as the Town dinner: a grand affair.

¹ The three full-length volumes of Sir Alfred's autobiography are entitled *An Artist's Life*, *The Second Burst* and *The Finish*.

Before that, in the afternoon, we were shown round the printing works of Richard Clay of Bungay, where my Volumes I and II were printed and bound, and where this, my last effort, will be done. Afterwards we were invited to take tea in their guest house – a Georgian house in an old, narrow street. The Art event happened there.

‘We were shown into a cosy parlour with grey, distempered walls. Hanging over the mantelpiece, well-lit and framed, was a large and excellent Medici colour reproduction of Vermeer’s picture of Delft. Never was I more struck with the beauties of a landscape. The buildings across the river – the still June day – the lighting – the sky. A most peaceful sky! It was the only picture in the room, and perfectly placed. Its effect was complete. It held me in a spell and laid a train of thought which led me, curiously enough, to another reposeful picture in far-off Edinburgh. A large landscape by Ruysdael, hanging in the Scottish National Gallery – one of my favourite pictures – which I must see again soon or die: it is beyond description. Under a clouded, placid sky, a smooth-surfaced river curves through a chalk country into the far distance. The eye is attracted to well-placed figures and incidents. It is a beautiful design to live with – a picture without a fault, which gives peace to the soul.

‘Also hanging in the Edinburgh collection is Gainsborough’s world-famous portrait of the beautiful Mrs Graham.

‘Would that we could make a journey there together, and that I could give a short address in front of it, afterwards reading out the story of the portrait – and few pictures could tell a sadder one.

‘Sir Thomas Lawrence once said that Gainsborough’s portrait of Mrs Siddons was the greatest female portrait in the world. The same may be said of Mrs Graham’s.

‘Speaking of these two pictures of beautiful women, I am reminded of yet one more of the many painted by Gainsborough – that of Mrs Robinson, the ill-fated Perdita hanging in the centre of a wall in the long upstairs gallery of the Wallace Collection in London.

‘How long and how often have I sat on the circular settee in front of that faultless piece of painting, my mind drifting back to the eighteenth century: to Schomberg House, where Perdita sat to Gainsborough. Where he actually portrayed her on the tall canvas and gave her that exquisite poise of the head.

‘Looking at the picture for hours, I have tried to imagine him at work on it: modelling the perfect face – making those deft and subtle brush-strokes on the flounced edging of the skirt.

‘Again and again have I risen from the seat, stepping close to the canvas to examine the inexplicable technique of inspired genius; a genius far beyond our comprehension; a genius born of the English climate, landscape and temperament.

‘Alive and beautiful, Perdita sits looking down at me with that calm,

pensive, enigmatic expression which becomes more elusive and attractive as I gaze back at her. She brings the eighteenth century into the room with ghosts of the past who are there gazing at her too. Gainsborough immortalized her dog companion when he painted it at her side.

'Studying its alert, watchful eye and expression, I always wonder what it was called.

'Perdita's portrait has a story as sad even as Mrs Graham's.

'Before leaving the Gallery, I look at another masterpiece on the same wall to the right: "The Laughing Cavalier", by Frans Hals.

'The sitter's expression is the entire opposite to Perdita's, but, like Gainsborough's picture, it appears to be done with ease. Yet, looking awhile, you know that the artist was holding his breath as he mastered this passage or that! The paint is as fresh as if the portrait were done only yesterday.

'Taking off my hat to Perdita, I walk out of the long gallery and, passing through lower rooms, arrive in front of a small picture, "The Dead Trumpeter", by Horace Vernet. I study the painting of the figure, the crimson breeches, the shako fallen on the ground. I take the story to heart and grieve at the sight of the dog licking the dead man's face. What heroic story-telling in a small canvas by a patriotic painter who had faith in his country; who knew about men and horses in war! . . . who was not conscious of doing wrong when telling a story in paint. "Curse all highbrows," say I.

'Again, near the door going out, I look for the hundredth time at Lady Blessington's portrait by the great Sir Thomas Lawrence. When sitting alone in the council room of the Academy in front of Lawrence's self-portrait, how often did I wish that I could meet his ghost! Sir Thomas was a lovable man. Dear Lady Blessington; you knew and gathered round you a crowd of men. Poets, painters, sculptors and authors.

'On 5th November 1831, with D'Orsay and others you watched Squire Osbaldeston galloping hour after hour around the four-mile course at Newmarket, using twenty-eight horses in his match against time - doing 200 miles in eight hours forty-two minutes in storms of rain.

'I leave this masterpiece of English portrait-painting, and walking down the stairs, I stop and look at a marble bust of Madame de Serilly by Jean Antoine Houdon, dated 1782. And I wonder at the folly and mistaken wisdom of fools who gloat over the incompetent, uncouth shapes fashioned by men of today who are styled sculptors.

'About the same time when Madame de Serilly was sitting for Houdon to make her bust in marble, Perdita was going to Schomberg House to sit for Gainsborough for hours.

'Having long ago seen Boilly's picture, in the Louvre, of Houdon at work in his studio, modelling the bust of a gentleman seated on the model's throne - the sculptor's two daughters in white dresses, looking on - I can picture him at work on this bust of the beautiful Madame de Serilly.

'As I stand on the staircase looking at her, she seems alive, and I think of the awful years that followed 1782. Thus do the works of sincere men who were great artists lead our thoughts away, taking us out of the present into the past, trying to picture scenes that happened long ago.

'Then I go out into Manchester Square, hail a taxi and am taken to the National Gallery. In front of me as I enter, hanging on the wall of the staircase, is a Reynolds portrait of Perdita's lover, Sir Banastre Tarleton, Bart: a hero of the American war. Conceived and painted in the grand manner, the portrait is a fine example of the solid work of Sir Joshua, and is, I am sure, a good likeness. For those who know the story of the unfortunate Perdita and her fearless, fast-living soldier lover, this painting will start fresh trains of thought, leading always to Perdita's fate, alas! When I leave Tarleton's picture, I am not ashamed if I shed a tear for her. She deserves our tears. Stopping to make my bow to Hogarth on the stairs, I go into the first room, and there, facing me on the same wall, are pictures by Gainsborough of Mrs Siddons, Doctor Schomberg and another smaller one of the artist's two little daughters chasing a butterfly.

'The room is full of Gainsborough family history – its troubles and joys – for those who have read the artist's life: Whitley's for choice.

'On the opposite long wall, in the left corner, is another study of the young girls, painted in Gainsborough's early days. These two works alone prove to us that he could not fail to make a portrait, for one sees in them a plain resemblance to himself and their mother. On each side of the centre Gainsborough landscape on that wall are later portraits of the two daughters grown to womanhood. One, against her father's wishes, married the German musician, Fischer, who played the oboe. All went wrong in a year, and the marriage was dissolved. As I look at that daughter's picture I imagine family scenes in Schomberg House. . . . What a great portrait this is!

'But let me return to the masterpiece of Mrs Siddons that I came to see, and which I hope to see again – and often.

'Resolving to end with this great English painter at his best, I stood in front of the picture of the famous actress.

'Stepping back, lost in admiration as I looked at her, I began to dream: to try to recall things I had read of the stage of that day, of the all-alive audiences, of the actor families . . . of so many things. I cast these thoughts aside, and tried once more to picture the artist at work: his soul in his eyes, his outstretched hand with the long, delicate brush painting that nostril, that eye! I could see him painting the hat – the set of it! I knew, too, that the sitter was an individual; a great actress.

'Yet as I looked at Mrs Siddons, Perdita's face still haunted me with its elusive expression, and the lovely Mrs Graham remained incomparable. Portraits like these – of Mrs Siddons, Mrs Graham and Perdita – possess a poetic beauty that rises far beyond the bounds of mere achievement in paint to realms of rare creative genius. All else is outside the pale.

'Maybe, there are a few besides painters who will grasp my ill-expressed effort to say only a little of what I feel about the truly great and their art.

'Readers, believe me or not, this is the rarest style of English genius, of English painting. Let us return to these masters more often, reading the while the letters of the unsurpassable Horace Walpole. I find it easy, sitting here at my Sheraton table, to see Mrs Siddons; her face and eye, the black-velvet ribband round her neck, the slant of the large hat, the blue-striped dress, the pose.

'And all the time I am seeing her I can see also a page of Walpole's letters. It is letter 194, "Robbed on the Highway", that is before me. Here it is - or part of it:

' "Lady Browne and I were, as usual, going to the Duchess of Montrose at seven o'clock. The evening was very dark. In the close lane under her park pale, and within twenty yards of the gate, a black figure on horseback pushed by between the chaise and the hedge on my side. I suspected it was a highwayman, and so I found did Lady Browne, for she was speaking and stopped. To divert her fears, I was just going to say, 'Is not that the apothecary going to the Duchess?' when I heard a voice cry 'Stop!' and the figure came back to the chaise. I had the presence of mind, before I let down the glass to take out my watch and stuff it within my waistcoat under my arm. He said, 'Your purses and watches!' I replied, 'I have no watch.' 'Then your purse!' I gave it to him; it had nine guineas. It was so dark that I could not see his hand, but felt him take it. He then asked for Lady Browne's purse, and said, 'Don't be frightened; I will not hurt you.' I said, 'No; you won't frighten the lady?' He replied, 'No; I give you my word I will do you no hurt.' Lady Browne gave him her purse, and was going to add her watch, but he said, 'I am much obliged to you! I wish you good night!' pulled off his hat, and rode away. 'Well,' said I, 'Lady Browne, you will not be afraid of being robbed another time, for you see there is nothing in it.' 'Oh! but I am,' said she, 'and now I am in terrors lest he should return, for I have given him a purse with only bad money that I carry on purpose,' etc."

'This all goes with the portrait of the heroine of the Georgian stage - with the audience! - with Gainsborough and Reynolds. I ask my readers, "Did either of these great souls ever recourse to a stunt?" Stunts were never in the make-up of genius of their order.

'The hour is late. Tomorrow I shall clear the table of all papers, sketch-books, notes written early in the morning. Papers which have got in the way, have flowed over other tables, chairs, bureau, and even amongst the bottles and things on the sideboard. I hear only the sound of the tall clock in the hall as I fill a glass of port.

'Still seeing the portrait of Mrs Siddons, I drink to the memory of Gainsborough and his beautiful sitter, and couple their names with Reynolds,

Goldsmith, Walpole and Gray – and, remembering Gainsborough's landscapes, his rambles in the countryside that he loved, I call on the spirit of Gray, whose *Elegy* was published two hundred years ago to respond:

One morn I miss'd him on the custom'd hill,
 Along the heath, and near his favourite tree;
 Another came; nor yet beside the rill,
 Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he.

'Art is long – life is short!'

